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NEW
World

THE OLD RAGMAN AND MRS. DEAN.

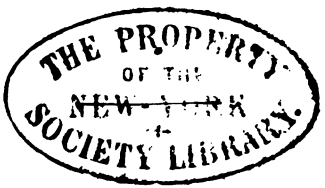
THE UNTEMPERED WIND

THE

UNTEMPERED WIND

BY

JOANNA E. WOOD



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THE UNTEMPERED WIND.

CHAPTER I.

——"Consider this,—
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation:"—

It was early spring, the maples were but budding, the birds newly come and restless, the sky more gray than blue, and the air still sharp with a tang of frost. Jamestown's streets, however, looked both bright and busy.

Groups of children went to school, hurrying out to the street, and looking this way and that for a companion. A mother came to a gate with a little girl, and pointing now to right, now to left, seemed to give her directions which way to go. The little girl started bravely. She wore a pink cap, and carried a new school-bag. "Hurry on!" a girl called to her, and she advanced uncertainly. A hesitating dignity born of the new school-bag forbade a decided run; her friend's haste forbade her to linger. They met and passed on together.

An old man, with ophthalmia, feeling his way with a stick and muttering to himself with loose lips, went by. Two brothers crossed the street together, one swinging along easily, smoking a pipe, and carrying an axe over his shoulder; the other advancing with that spasmodic appearance of haste which seems the only gait to which crutches can be *compelled*.

An alert dog rushed madly up the middle of the street, pausing abruptly now and then to look round him with sharp interrogation, as if daring anything to "come on!" His challenge was vain, and he was fain to solace himself by scattering a convention of sparrows, dashing into the midst of them and sending the birds up into the maples, followed by insulting yelps, in reply to which they twittered in derision.

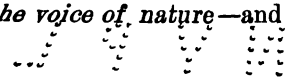
Homer Wilson drove his team of heavy brown horses through the street at a trot, his sinewy frame clad in weather-beaten blue jeans, his hat pushed far back on his head, as if to emphasize the defiant breadth of his forehead.

The woman still strained her eyes after the little girl, now only distinguishable by the brightness of her cap. They say that mothers often watch by the gateways of life.

The groceryman passed to open his store—the baker and butcher were already busy.

Through this scene of busy commonplace interest and bustle passed a woman, somewhat below the average height, and of strong but symmetrical build. Her face was downbent and almost hidden in the depths of a dark sunbonnet of calico. All that could well be discerned in this shadow were two soft, sorrowful eyes, pale cheeks, and downdrooped lips. No one spoke to her, and she addressed no one. She went from place to place, out of one shop into another, with downcast eyes, and with something of that swift directness with which a bird, startled from its nest at evening, darts with folded wings from covert to covert. She was Myron Holder—a mother, but not a wife.

When under no more sacred canopy than the topaz of a summer sky—with no other bridal hymn than the choral of the wind among the trees—in obedience to no law but *the voice of nature*—and the pleading of loved lips—with



no other security than the unwitnessed oath of a man—a woman gives herself utterly, then she is doubtless lost. But it must be remembered that the law she breaks is an artificial law enacted solely for *her* protection: and it must be conceded that there may be a great and self-subversive generosity which permits her to give her all, assuming bonds of sometimes dreadful weight, whilst the recipient goes his way unshackled—uncondemned.

There may be nothing to be said in defence of Myron Holder; but there is much that could be told only with bleeding lips, written only by a pen dipped in wormwood, of the attitude of her fellows towards her.

The world of to-day sees its Madonna, with haloed head, standing amid lilies. The world of her day saw neither nimbus nor flowers; they saw what, to their unbelieving eyes, was but her shame. Let those who jeer with righteous lips at women such as this poor village outcast, remember that the meek Maid-Mother whom they adore perchance shrank before the cruel taunts and pointing fingers of women at the doorways and the wells.

Myron Holder left the butcher's to go to the grocery store; from thence she crossed diagonally to Mrs. Warner's, the woman who, half an hour before, had looked so lingeringly after her child. Myron stood at the back door waiting, whilst Mrs. Warner came down stairs to answer her knock. "Mrs. Deans wanted to know if Mrs. Warner would lend her the quilting-frames." Mrs. Warner would.

Mrs. Warner was a very good woman, therefore she looked unutterable contempt at Myron Holder, and left her on the doorstep, whilst she brought out the heavy wooden quilting-frames. Mrs. Warner's husband drove the mail wagon which made one trip daily to the city and back to Jamestown. He would in one hour, as his wife

very well knew, pass Mrs. Deans' door, but she did not consider that; and as she had watched her own child out of sight, so she watched Myron Holder's laden form pass down the street, out into the country—a large basket in one hand, and the heavy quilting-frames over her shoulder, pressing sorely upon "the sacred mother-bosom," already yearning for the easing child lips.

When clear of the village, Myron Holder slackened her pace a little and setting the basket down for a moment turned back the deep scoop of her sunbonnet, that the cooling wind might breathe its benison upon her cheeks, flushed with shame and hot from the exertion of her rapid walk with her burden. Stooping slowly down sideways, she reached her basket and taking it up proceeded on her way. Her face shone forth from the dark folds of her sunbonnet, and seemed by its purity of line and expression to give the lie to the eyes filmed by acknowledged shame; only filmed, however, for the eyes themselves held no vile meanings, no defiant avowal of guilt, no hint of sinful knowledge, no glance of callous indifference. She walked on steadily, the spongy earth beneath her feet seeming to breathe forth the essence of spring as it inhaled the warmth of the sunshine.

Presently the sound of wheels came to her. She strove with her burdened hand to brush forward the sheltering folds of her sunbonnet, but in vain, as her haste defeated its object. Her cheeks were shrouded but in a flaming blush as Homer Wilson drove past. He stared at her steadily; but she did not raise her eyes, and he passed on. His springless wagon jolted over all the stones and inequalities of the country roads, just as Homer Wilson neither brushed aside obstacles nor skirted them when they opposed his path, but, in his obstinate, hard-headed *way, rode rough*-shod over them, feeling, perhaps, the

SHE PAUSED TO REST.

hurt of their opposition, but never showing that he did.

Again there was silence on the road. It was too early yet for any insect life, and the sparrows did not fly so far from the houses, but

> "Above in the wind was the swallow
> Chasing itself at its own wild will."

The flush for a space died out of her cheeks. As she continued on her way the snake-fence changed to a neat board one, that in turn gave place to one of ornate wire. In the middle of this was a little gate, which she passed; then came a wider five-barred gate through which she entered, and found her way to the rear of a large white frame house, standing in an old apple orchard.

Her steps were bent to the "cook house," an erection of unplaned pine boards, where, in summer, the kitchen-work of Mrs. Deans' household was carried on. Before Myron Holder crossed its threshold, she sent one long look over to the left, where, leafless yet and gray—save where a cedar made a sullen blotch of green—the trees of Mr. Deans' woodland bounded her vision in a semi-circular sweep. As she turned her to the doorway, a new expression had found place within her eyes—upon her lips—poignant but indecipherable. For resolution, resignation, and despair are sometimes so analogous as to be inseparable.

CHAPTER II.

"A treasure of the memory, a joy unutterable."

"Her tears fell with the dews at even;
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried.
She could not look at the sweet heaven
Either at morn or eventide."

MYRON HOLDER'S father was Jed Holder, the broom-maker. His death occurred when Myron was eighteen years old. He had clung to his quaint occupation to the last, after factory-made brooms stood even at the store doors in Jamestown.

His fortunes had fallen off sadly in the last few years of his life, but he worked away as steadily at his trade as in the old days, when, looking from his door, his eyes were met by the mast-like masses of a Kentish hop orchard. He had planted hopvines all about the fence of his little house in Jamestown. They clambered up the sides of the house, twined insinuatingly about the disdainful sunflowers, and throwing their tendrils abroad from the roots wound round and round the tall stalks of grass, weighing them down with the burden of their unsought embrace.

Little Myron was often impressed with the truth that a single leaf broken from a growing hopvine kills the whole spray. She learned to "pick up her feet," as her father expressed it, and step daintily between the wandering vines, so that no slurring footstep might injure them.

Jed Holder had carried on the broom-making for many years very systematically. Year by year he rented from Sol Disney a bit of the virgin soil of the woodland, and the tall brown tassel of the broom corn overtopped the *stumps in* the clearing. Year by year the little patch of

corn crept nearer and nearer the limit of Disney's diminishing woodland—seeming, as Jed Holder said, "to sweep the trees off before it," but being in its turn swept aside by waves of golden grain.

It was a sore day to Jed Holder when he sent off his first order for Western broom corn, forced to do so by the impossibility of renting ground rich enough to perfect and mature his crop.

In the short winter days Jed used to work in Disney's brush helping to "clear" it. In return for his services he received all the young maples they encountered: out of these in the long winter evenings he fashioned his broom handles.

Jed never could remember how the knowledge was conveyed to him that broom handles were being made by the thousands by a machine out of the refuse in the wake of logging camps.

If the recognition of this iconoclastic fact was not an intuition, it must have been something very like one—some transmission of a half contemptuous thought from the brain of the smart groceryman in the city when he ridiculed the price Jed asked for his hand-made brooms. Jed pondered over the matter much, but never could recall the source of his information. But when he lay in his last illness, watching the shadow of the hopvine on the blinds, all these tormenting thoughts vanished. The murmurs that fell from his lips were all of other days, of hop picking, of England, of Kentish lanes and birds, of one whom he named lovingly as "Myron lass" and yet did not seem to identify with the girl who waited upon him so untiringly, under the direction of her grandmother, an old, old woman, bent with rheumatism, and hard of face and heart, whose lips set cruelly and eyes grew stony when her gray-haired son babbled of "Myron lass." When he

lay in his coffin she could not grieve, for raging that he was not to lie with all his kin in Kent.

She made Myron suffer vicariously for her long dead mother, whose death coming soon after Myron's birth had driven Jed Holder to seek strange scenes, away from where he had known the fullest happiness of which he was capable.

But Myron bore her grandmother's bad temper with patience and without bitterness. Her father often said to her, "The yeast is bitter, but it is the yeast that makes bread sweet."

Jed Holder died one day in autumn, when the aromatic green cones had been picked from the hops and lay browning upon paper-covered boards in the sun. The last breath Jed Holder drew savored of their fragrance, and the aroma of the hops dispelled the faint odor of mortality in the death chamber.

The winter succeeding his death was a long and bitter one. Fuel was high; and however sparingly bought, still the plainest provisions cost money. Albeit Myron and her grandmother lived frugally, yet they exhausted Jed's poor hoardings very soon. Spring found them penniless.

But in summer, life is more easily sustained, and Myron found various occupations which sufficed to keep her grandmother in tolerable comfort. Hoeing and weeding, cleaning house and berrying, doing extra washings, cooking for threshers and harvesters, all had their part in Myron's busy life. Her grandmother was never satisfied either with her ability or her willingness to work; but for all that she worked, and worked well too.

There was soon proof positive of this given her grandmother, for after Myron had helped in the half yearly saturnalia of work Mrs. Deans called "house cleaning," the latter arranged to have Myron come to the farm daily to help the bound girl.

For that summer Mrs. Deans had boarders—boarders who read, and walked, and brought in great bunches of golden rod, and masses of wild aster, and long trails of virgin bower clematis.

There were Mrs. and Miss Rexton, Miss Carpenter and Dr. Henry Willis, a young medico. They had all driven to the lake one day from the Mineral Spring Hotel, where they were stopping. The lake curved in a shining semi-circle round Jamestown, and swept off in ever-widening curves far away, until sky and water blended in a band of blinding silver radiance. The party of four had been caught in a thunderstorm, and sought refuge on Mrs. Deans' veranda.

Then and there they had decided that they must come there for the rest of the summer, and with one accord set about persuading Mrs. Deans to give her consent. Of a truth their persuasion would have had little effect upon that worthy woman, had not the remuneration suggested seemed to her quite extravagantly sufficient; therefore she was pleased at length to accede to their request, and a few days later found the quartette comfortably settled at Mrs. Deans'.

Miss Carpenter was Dr. Willis' maiden aunt. Miss Rexton believed herself to be his affinity and hoped that he agreed with her. Mrs. Rexton was a chattel of her daughter's.

Myron Holder's duties were now made more manifold than ever, but she was well content that it should be so; only the long mile she walked night and morning from and to the village tired her greatly, taking the edge off her vitality in the morning and utterly exhausting her at night. So Mrs. Deans proposed that she should stay all night at the farm; not actuated by any kindly thought for Myron, but because, like the good financier that she was, she wanted to *get her mo*ney's worth out of her.

As for old Mrs. Holder, she had no timid qualms about staying alone: she missed the little scraps of news, however, that Myron always had to tell, and—unconsciously—suffered from lack of some one to berate.

The summer passed slowly—autumn came. Mrs. Deans' boarders departed. Myron Holder once more walked the mile night and morning; she had had a hard summer's work. Her hands and wrists were reddened and coarsened; her face was very pale, and *bistre* shades lingered about her eyes. But she and her grandmother had to live, and after December snows were blowing she still trudged the mile back and forth.

It was only by great chance that Mrs. Deans retained Myron's services; but her son, a loutish young man of twenty-two, had fallen from a hickory-nut tree and dislocated his hip.

The increasing attention he demanded, and the care of her poultry, and her accumulated sewing kept Mrs. Deans fully occupied. So Myron Holder continued her daily attendance at the Deans farm. January and February passed. March was blowing its wildest, when one day Myron Holder did not come to Mrs. Deans'.

The latter waited fuming, resolved, as she expressed it, to "give Myron Holder a fine hearing when she *did* come."

Mrs. Deans was always promising somebody or other a "hearing," which, by the bye, was an exceedingly misleading term, for in the conversation thus referred to the other party did the listening whilst Mrs. Deans talked.

The wild wind of the morning had intensified into a bitter sleet, which darted its blasts into the face like sharp-pointed lashes, when Mrs. Deans heard a knock at the side door. She opened it herself to find old Mrs. Holder, bent, *wet, furious, standing* in the slush. Mrs. Deans bade her

come in, with a meaning look at the corn husk mat before the door.

Mrs. Holder paid no heed to the look, but with muddy feet stepped into the room fair upon Mrs. Deans' new rag carpet, and standing there, a quaint old figure, clad in the forgotten fashion of thirty years back, proceeded to give Mrs. Deans what that lady herself would have called "a hearing."

Mrs. Deans had a ready tongue, an inventive imagination, a fund of vituperative imagery, and a pleasant habit of drowning the voice of any one who chose to contradict her; but in one's own house, to be confronted in this way, abused for some unknown crime, covered with contumely, and showered with contemptuous epithets, and all from an old woman whose granddaughter was honored in doing one's kitchen work, was not conducive to dignity and presence of mind.

Mrs. Deans was too old a scold, however, to be routed without an effort to vindicate herself. Finding it vain to wait an opportunity for speech (Mrs. Holder never seemed to pause for breath), she simply began to talk also—Myron's non-appearance, Mrs. Holder's impertinence, and her own mystification giving ample subject-matter for her eloquence to do justice to.

But Mrs. Holder talked on, apparently unconscious of Mrs. Deans' remarks—finally she hurled one direct question at the latter: "Did you know—that's what I want to find out—did ye? And if ye did, what d'ye think of yourself? You——"

She was about to branch off into a personal description of Mrs. Deans—somewhat unflattering—when the latter seized her cue.

"Did I know what?" she demanded.

Mrs. Holder *came to a* dead stop and looked at her.

"Did I know what?" reiterated Mrs. Deans majestically.

"Did you know—Myron—" she stopped, this thing was difficult to frame in words.

"Well?" said Mrs. Deans.

"Did you know Myron was—would be—had—" again the voluble Mrs. Holder faltered. Mrs. Deans looked at Mrs. Holder—and something whispered to her what Mrs. Holder could not say. "Do you mean to tell me—" she paused—filling up the hiatus with an eloquent look.

Then she loosened the tides of her indignation, and sweeping aside all memories of Myron's honesty, and faithful service, and patience, launched against her the full flood of her invective.

Presently Mrs. Holder chimed in: there was something absurd yet tragically repulsive in these two women, but a moment before reviling each other, now absorbed only in the desire to outvie each other in the epithets they hurled against the girl—the granddaughter of the one, the uncomplaining servant of the other.

Their attitude, however, was prophetically typical of the treatment Myron Holder was to receive. The whole village forgot its private quarrels to point the finger at its common victim. Beset with all the frightful anticipations of motherhood, bowed beneath the burden of a shame she appreciated and accepted, hounded nearly to madness by her grandmother's jibes and reproaches, Myron Holder's heart was wellnigh desperate.

The spring winds brought her dreadful suggestions of despair. The first hepaticas shone up at her as balefully as the lighted fagots to a martyr's eye. The springing hopvines seemed to twine their tendrils tight and tighter about her heart. All the scents and sounds of spring were ever after to her an exquisite torture. But her soul was *of strong fibre.*

Before all the scorn of the village, all the rebukes of Mrs. Deans, all the wrath of her grandmother, all the bitterness and misery and hopelessness of her own heart, Myron Holder was mute.

No murmur escaped her lips against the man who had forsaken her. The village knew her shame, but it could not fathom her secret. Myron Holder was deaf to all commands, entreaties, persuasions, sneers. Her face, holy with the divine shadow of coming maternity, turned to her questioners an indecipherable page—writ large with characters of shame and sorrow, but telling naught else.

. . . . . .

There came a night when Myron Holder descended into that hell of suffering called child-birth—struggled with prolonged agony—helpless and alone—and cried aloud —to that dead father—to that unknown mother—to God —for Death.

Myron Holder was a woman and had come to years of knowledge, and her fall was doubtless a sin and a shame to her—black and unforgivable; but far as Myron Holder had fallen, deep as was her humiliation, black as was her shame, inexcusable her error, she still shines in effulgent whiteness when compared with those women who refused her aid that long night through, demanding as recompense for their ministering the betrayal of her betrayer. Myron Holder would not pay their price.

The dim gray dawn lighted the pain-scarred face of a sleeping mother, by whose side reposed a fair-haired child; a child the secret of whose parentage was still locked within its mother's heart.

. . . . . .

"Them kind always lives," Mrs. Warner said to her husband, when, *on a June* morning, she saw Myron Holder

totter past her door. Mrs. Warner should have thanked the God she worshipped, fasting, that it was so: had Myron Holder died, no woman in all Jamestown would have been free from blood-guiltiness. They had beheld a woman in such extremity as moved the hearts of Inquisitors, stayed the torch of persecution, shackled the relentless rack, deferred the vengeance of the law, and had withheld their hands from helping.

Those same hands which wrought garments for the heathen and shamed not to offer their alms to God!

CHAPTER III.

"It is a wild and miserable world,
Thorny and full of care,
Which every friend can make his prey at will."

"Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong."

BENEATH the quietness of Myron Holder's manner there raged a very chaos of reckless, despairing thought. It is undeniable that at this time no maternal love warmed her heart towards her child.

There was one night—one dreadful night—whose memory stained forever even the dark pages of her retrospect. A night through the long hours of which she lay and thought of death—not to herself—but to the sleeping infant at her side. All the tales she had ever heard of desperate women's crimes came to her, assailing her weakened will and tired brain with insidious suggestions of safety, and freedom, and immunity from blame.

Pallid, she rose in the early dawn. As she passed the

old English mirror in its shabby gilt frame, she caught a fleeting glimpse of burning cheeks, cracking parched lips and bloodshot eyes. She withdrew her glance shuddering.

It was very early in the morning. She crossed the kitchen, and softly opening the door looked forth upon the unawakened world. The air was somewhat chilly, but sweet and soft. A heavy dew spread a pearly film over the grass, broken here and there by a silvery shield, where the spider webs held the moisture: gossamers they are in these early morning hours when the world is pure and quiet,—shreds of the Madonna's winding sheet, as we all know. But what are they when the dew is gone and they are laden with the dust and soot and grime of the long hot day? Gossamers still?

Down between the trees she could see the dull glimmer of the lake, awaiting the sun to strike it into silver; a few pale stars lingered, loath to bid the world good-by before the moon, which, a wraith-like orb, still soared on high, white and diaphanous. All was calm, passionless, and pure. As Myron Holder looked there grew within her soul a sick shuddering against the woman of the past night. She saw herself vile where all was holy, passionate where all was peace. And from her soul, a plea, indefinite in aspiration, and vaguely voyaging to some unknown haven, went forth, that her old heart might be vouchsafed to her, her own suffering, fearing, trusting, loving, betrayed heart, instead of this throbbing centre of pain with its bitter blood of despair and hate.

Slow resolutions began to stir in her heart: she would go through the world "spending and being spent" for others: she would be patient to her grandmother, always remembering she had shamed her: she would be true and faithful and self-*sacrificing in* every relation she assumed to others.

she would be sympathetic to all and she would die soon, very soon, she thought, and the village would mourn her and at last speak of her with loving kindness. Poor Myron! Like "many mighty men," she did not realize the utter barreness of a posthumous joy or understand how diffident Death can be when wooed.

Her mood was jarred by the child's cry and the grandmother's querulous complaint. She turned from the morning just as the sun's rays shot across the lake.

As soon as she was able to do so she resumed her work—bending over her toil, a patient figure in a worn blue print gown and dark sunbonnet, a humble mark she seemed for public scorn: yet all the scandal and spite of the scurrilous little village played about her.

As Mrs. Disney expressed it, old Mrs. Holder "took it most terrible hard": therefore the village matrons contracted a habit of running in at all hours to the little hop-clad house and condoling with Mrs. Holder, and with her speculating as to the identity of the child's father.

Now and then these zealous comforters rather overdid the matter, notably when Mrs. Weaver, with a view of exonerating Mrs. Holder from all blame and relieving her of all responsibility for Myron's behavior, remarked that "It did seem as if bad was born in some people."

Old Mrs. Holder rose at that, and speedily made Mrs. Weaver aware that Myron's badness was purely sporadic, and that heredity had nothing to do with it. She did not express herself in this way, but conveyed the same idea much more forcibly.

It is possible that, being Myron's grandmother, she felt a slight reflection from Mrs. Weaver's well-meant suggestion that Myron had inherited vice as her birthright; be that as it may, she speedily made Mrs. Weaver aware that if there was any truth in such an idea, she herself must be

in a perilous state: the old Englishwoman had managed to glean pretty accurate data about the Jamestown people, and she knew that Mrs. Weaver's mother had "tript in her time." Mrs. Weaver called no more upon Mrs. Holder, but the others showed no abatement of their zeal.

These good Jamestown women had a pleasant habit of sitting with Mrs. Holder until Myron's form appeared at noon or night. They gazed at her while she opened the gate, trod the little path past the front door, and until she turned the corner: when Vice in the person of Myron entered the back door, Virtue embodied in one or more of Jamestown's matrons fled from the front door, hearing, ere the gate was reached, the first measures of the jeremiad with which her grandmother greeted her. There was little wonder that Myron Holder grew morbidly nervous and supersensitive. She would scarce have been responsible for any deed, however evil.

All the morning the anticipated agony of the ordeal of walking up the path, under these scathing eyes, oppressed and tortured her. No martyr ever contemplated with greater dread the red-hot ploughshares than Myron Holder did those few yards of red trodden earth, bordered by fox grass and burdock leaves.

Through the long hours of the slow afternoons she braced herself for the return home at night, but she did not try to elude any of the humiliations of her position. The garden gate was terrible to her as the surgeon's knife to the sufferer—for the hasp was loosened and twisted, the gate had to be lifted before it could be opened, and sometimes she was kept fumbling with the fastening until the blood swam before her eyes in a red mist.

Doubtless she should have considered all these painful contingencies and walked more heedfully, but the thought, which the Jamestown matrons often quoted, did not, as

they seemed to think it should, dull the pain of the thousand stings she received daily—it only pressed them home.

There are many

> "Dainty themes of grief
> In sadness to outlast the morn;"

but the tale of Myron Holder's expiation is not one of them—it is a sordid theme, yet, being human, not too sordid to be writ out. It is a painful relation; but when one woman lived it, we may not shrink from contemplating it, nor hesitate to view step by step the way one woman trod.

The first summer of her child's life wore away. Autumn came before Myron Holder was goaded into any demonstration of her suffering.

She was one day working for Mr. Disney, who worked old Mr. Carroll's place on shares. It was the time of the apple harvest. All day long they had been picking, gathering, sorting, and carrying the heavy fruit. Between Mr. Carroll and Mr. Disney was waged a continual war of wits, each endeavoring to get the better of the other. The afternoon was far spent when old Mr. Carroll came limping out, bent and thin, only his erectness of poise when he stood still evidencing the old soldier.

The fruit had been divided into two long heaps, alike in their dimensions, but, as all the pickers knew, of widely different quality.

The grass was sere and yellowed, the sapless apple leaves fell in rustling showers at the lightest breath of wind, and now and then an apple fell with a dull sound upon the earth. The brown side of the drive-house formed a neutral background into which all the sombre tints of the little scene blended, save the brilliant reds and yellows of the two long piles of apples.

"Well, Mr. Disney—got the apples sorted?" asked Mr. Carroll with affected geniality. Mr. Disney, a shallow-witted man, was betrayed by the smile on the lips into disregard of the cold eyes, and replied with rash effusiveness:

"Yes—picked, sorted, divided, sold, almost cooked and eaten." Old Mr. Carroll's smile froze.

"Which is my pile?" he asked with an indescribable intonation of sarcastic contempt, which pierced even Disney's denseness and made a slow red gather to his cheeks as he answered—"That one."

"Then I'll take this one," replied Mr. Carroll, indicating the other. Disney faltered then—wanted to re-divide—and managed to confuse himself completely. Mr. Carroll listened contemptuously; his keen old eyes had discerned the mud on the apples in the heap assigned to him, and he had decided, rightly enough, that they were windfalls.

Disney's half-hearted plea for a re-division was manifestly absurd, and the caustic old man enjoyed a pleasant half-hour in ridiculing the idea. For once he had his enemy fairly "on the hip."

The end of it was that presently, when Mr. Warner drove past, he saw old Mr. Carroll enthroned upon an upturned bushel basket, his cynical old eyes gleaming with amusement, his feet shifting restlessly with delight, his tongue irritating Disney almost beyond endurance.

He had placed himself on the side of the drive-house door and demanded that his apples be carried in then and there. Disney longed to refuse, but his agreement provided that he perform all the labor of harvesting and storing Mr. Carroll's share. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to obey the irascible old man, who, in numerous playful ways, made the carrying in of the fruit a weariness of *the flesh* to Disney. He stopped him to

pull stray wisps of grass out of his pails, or to examine a purely imaginary blemish in an apple. He let his cane slip down so that Disney tripped over it. He took one of the pails, and pretended to fix one of the handles, which was perfectly secure as it was—and all the time he talked, gently, irritatingly, making the most innocent of pauses for replies that Disney felt he must make, but which he made as briefly as possible.

The afternoon waned; finally the last apple of the heap was transferred to the drive-house. Then Mr. Carroll rose, trying his best to conceal the stiffness of his joints from Disney, locked the drive-house door and limped off to his lonely house, solitary but triumphant.

A little later he watched the departure of the disgusted Disney and his pickers—Myron Holder dragging wearily home alone, body and heart alike aching; the rest slyly nudging one another, with meaning looks at Disney's sullen face.

Still later, when Mr. Carroll blew out his yellow wax candle, he pushed aside the limp white blind, raised the many-paned window and looked forth into the moonlight. It was very clear and quiet. Disney's pile of apples lay roughly outlined beneath its covering of old sacks. Mr. Carroll looked at it amusedly—as he looked a stray apple, left swinging unseen, fell. As the sound reached his ears a malevolent smile irradiated his face. Still smiling, he put the window down, let the blind fall and sought sleep.

That night Myron Holder traversed the road home in the deepest dejection; forced to endure all day the covert sneers of the other pickers, with extreme bodily weariness added to her mental burden, helpless as a fly from which a wanton hand has torn the wings, she felt, as she trod her solitary way home, utterly despairing.

Ere she was fairly within the doors her grandmother's

taunting words met her. Roused from her long apathy of mute endurance, she tore her sunbonnet from her head and flashed one dreadful look of rage and defiance at the old woman—such a look as made Mrs. Holder stagger back, holding up her hand as if to shield herself from a blow. Terrified at the turmoil in her own breast, Myron turned and fled into her room. She saw the boy's little form upon the blue and white checked counterpane of her bed, she rushed up to the couch, her hands were clenched, her heart seemed throbbing in her throat. Dreadful thoughts circled about her, wild and diverse, but all hung upon the one axis of pain. Half in delirium, she bent over the child. It looked up at her and smiled, and stirred feebly, but yet as if its impulses made towards her. With a cry she caught it to her bosom.

There was one creature that yet smiled upon her. Thereafter, from day to day, throughout the long winter, her adoration of her child waxed stronger and stronger.

Every instant she could spare from her toiling she held it in her arms. On Sunday, when good Jamestown people did no extra work, Myron Holder had her only pleasure. For then she shut herself into her room with the child, whispering to it, caressing it, soothing it when awake, and during its long sleep holding it with loving avarice in her arms, too greedy of the cherished weight to relinquish it to the couch.

Her grandmother managed even from this tenderness to distill some bitter drops to add to Myron's cup. She dwelt long and eloquently upon the wrong Myron had done the child. Slowly the winter passed, and Mrs. Deans once more hired Myron Holder to come to the farm daily. The child was left with old Mrs. Holder, while Myron earned a subsistence for all three.

What Myron Holder endured daily no words can tell.

By what written sign may we symbolize the agony of a heart, bruised and pierced and crushed day after day? By what language express the torture of a pure soul, stifled in a chrysalis of shame?

Some souls may be purified by fire, doubtless, as the old Greeks cleansed their asbestos fabrics; but we should be wary how we thrust our fellows into the furnace, for no base tissue will stand the fire, and a soul, to emerge unsmirched and undestroyed, must be of strong fibre indeed.

CHAPTER IV.

"O Jesus, if thou wilt not save my soul,
Who may be saved? Who is it may be saved?
Who may be made a saint if I fail here?"

"As who should say: 'I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!'"

THERE are doubtless a few of us in the world capable of judging and pronouncing sentence upon the rest.

It is unfortunately inevitable, however, that such capabilities remain forever underestimated, and the possessors rarely receive the acknowledgments due from an ungrateful world.

Mrs. Deans was one of the chosen few who recognize their own infallibility, and accept as a sacred trust the knowledge that they are indispensable. To be a god, Mrs. Deans only lacked the minor attribute of immortality—a want of which she was herself unconscious.

Mrs. Deans strove earnestly to better her neighbors and cause them to conform to her standards of what was right. She was a firm believer that "open rebuke is better than *secret love*," and whatever risk Myron ran, under Mrs.

Deans' rule she incurred no danger of being "carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease"—a thing much to be dreaded. Nor was there any possibility of her forgetting, for a half-hour at a time, the light in which Mrs. Deans viewed her, which was, of course, the somewhat trying illumination that the Children of Light project upon the Children of Darkness.

Mrs. Deans had a modestly good opinion of herself. "Thou art the salt of the earth" impressed her with all the directness of a personal remark. Those who enjoyed the privileges of Mrs. Deans' household were, first and least, her husband—Henry Deans. He was a small man, with "a little wee face, with a little yellow beard, a Cain-colored beard." It was five years since his horses, running away as he returned from the market town, capsized him over a steep bank, down which the barrel of salt he had bought rolled also, and, striking him in the back, partially paralyzed him.

Since that time he had sat under his wife's ministry. In summer the back porch held his chair, in winter the kitchen. By keeping a careful eye upon the bound girl, he sometimes discovered her in a dereliction; it was a happy hour for him when this was the case. It had the effect of distracting his wife's attention from him, for one thing—and when too closely centred upon any one person, Mrs. Deans' regard was apt to prove embarrassing; it also won him much commendation from her—being convinced of the utter depravity of the bound girl, both "individually and collectively," it gratified Mrs. Deans to have her "moral certainty" attested by positive proofs. It made her realize her seer-like qualities.

Mrs. Deans' son, Gamaliel, known to his fond mother as "Maley," and to Jamestown as "Male," stood first in his mother's regard.

Gamaliel was Mrs. Deans' idea of a "fancy" name. She had hesitated long before bestowing it upon her boy, wavering between Gamaliel and Ambrose. She finally decided upon the former, it being more uncommon. The son of Mrs. Deans' sister-in-law's brother was called Ambrose—and, also, Gamaliel was, as Mrs. Deans said, "more suitable," whether to her son's mental or physical endowments she did not specify. Old Mrs. Holder once said she never could "picture out" any one else being called Gamaliel, nor believe that Mrs. Deans' son could have had any other name.

He was a stubborn young lout, whose strong will was only subjective to his mother's because he did not recognize his own strength. She had curbed him as he bitted the huge young Clydesdale colts. Sometimes a well-broken horse realizes its own strength, and we hear a horrid story of torn flesh and trampled limbs when it turns to rend its master. If Gamaliel Deans ever revolted, his mother would suffer.

However, he was quiescent enough, for his mother's schemes were all for his benefit. Besides, he appreciated the charms of a quiet life, and had inherited a liberal share of the diplomacy his paralytic father displayed when he feigned sleep for long hours at a stretch, hoping that he might entrap the bound girl into some piece of unwary carelessness. Both Henry Deans and his son Gamaliel had a deeply rooted belief in the value of the bound girl as a counter-irritant.

Mrs. Deans had had just a "pigeon pair" of children, as Jamestown put it, but her girl had died when an infant. Mrs. Deans was too good a woman not to bear up under the loss, especially as she did not care for girls.

The bound girl made up the regular trio which Mrs. *Deans drove before* her over roads of her choosing.

It is unnecessary to say much of the bound girl. Mrs. Deans described them often—"Evil incarnate," she called them. Mrs. Deans changed her bound girls now and then. They came to her with all the different merits and various vices of their unhappy class. They left her different incarnations of the same weary, broken, deadened spirit of labor and endurance. Their individual characteristics, capabilities and tendencies had nothing whatever to do with their case. Woman and mother as Mrs. Deans was, she was never moved by their peculiar needs.

It is requisite, doubtless, to the "Great Plan" that there be bound ones among us, enduring—like the hereditary embalmer—the parischite of Egypt—a loathsome heritage—and yet—the pity of it! But Mrs. Deans was not one to question the Providence which ordained for these bound girls their lot in life.

"They're born bad, and bad they are, and bad they'll be—every one of them—evil, root and branch; you can't be up to them and their ways." These were Mrs. Deans' sentiments upon the subject of bound girls, and other opinions do not matter.

The hired men Mrs. Deans treated with the deference due to those who must be conciliated and who are free agents. Mrs. Deans, if not exactly harmless as the traditional dove, had at least a smattering of the wisdom of the serpent.

Mrs. Deans was distinctly a leader in Jamestown society. She was a very good woman, liberal to the Church, foremost in collecting for missions, ready to head a donation list at any time; therefore every one said Myron Holder was very lucky to have won Mrs. Deans' help. That this "help" consisted in being allowed to do the hardest work under the most intolerable circumstances for very meagre pay, *they did not stop to* consider. Mrs. Deans said she

felt it a "duty" to have Myron Holder. We are all so thoroughly acquainted with the fact that duties are unpleasant, that the Jamestown women are not to be blamed for looking upon Mrs. Deans in the light of a martyr.

Mrs. Warner expressed the sense of the village view of the matter when she said, "It beats me how Mrs. Deans can put up with that Myron Holder! Going about as if she was injured, bless your heart, with a face as long as a fiddle and looking as if she was half killed, when she ought to be thankful to be let into a decent house to work."

And indeed the hopeless face Myron Holder bore above her aching heart was a public reproach; but we do not see rebuke where we do not look for it, and Jamestown felt itself above censure.

In the old Puritan graveyards in the New England States there was a place set apart, where in a common receptacle were buried those who held a different faith from the Puritans, or who avowed no faith at all. This was called the "damned corner." Whether the Puritans, out of zeal to do their Master's work, intended in this way to facilitate the business of separating the sheep from the goats, or whether it was with a view of securing their own sacred dust from contamination, does not appear. But it is a custom which still survives. We all have a "damned corner," where, beneath the intolerable burden of our disapprobation, we deposit those we *know* are wrong. Of course, common decency requires that we keep these spots swept with our criticism, garnished with invective; and when it is considered that in Mrs. Deans' eyes even Gamaliel sometimes showed faults, it will be understood the worthy woman had no sinecure.

Mrs. Deans' mind was somewhat "out of drawing" to her body, which was broad, large, fair, and of generous *proportions.* Why fat and good-temper should have

been so long proverbially associated is difficult to discern; in so far as the ordinary mind can analyze, it would seem as if adipose was a distinct excuse for bad temper. To be hotter than other people in summer and not so cold in winter is one of the simplest and most obvious results of fat—yet who shall say this is conducive to sympathy with other people?

Mrs. Deans had been a Warner, and was inclined to goitre. Her large head, with its oily bands of fair hair, was always somewhat inclined backwards. Her general appearance suggested, in a remote way, a colossal and bad-tempered pouter pigeon—a likeness absurdly emphasized sometimes by the redness of her eyes.

When Myron Holder crossed the threshold with the quilting-frames, a scene characteristic of the place greeted her. Mrs. Deans stood in the foreground, holding the floor; her husband listened to her eloquence, blinking appreciatively if somewhat apprehensively. You never knew—to use one of her own expressions—when you "had Mrs. Deans, and when you hadn't." She was apt to deflect suddenly from the chase she was engaged in, and start full cry after another's shortcomings. More than once Henry Deans, enjoying himself hugely while his wife browbeat the bound girls, had his joy turned to mourning by suddenly discovering that the peroration of his wife's address had for its inspiration his own shortcomings.

His wife was, as he confided to Gamaliel, "onsartain"; it was a perilous joy to listen to her, and, therefore, perhaps, the more exhilarating.

The bound girl—a slight, tow-headed child with high, unequal shoulders, and arms, and wrists, developed by her life of toil into absurd disproportion to her body—stood by the stove, listening with a dazed look in her weary eyes. She had broken a seven-cent lamp-glass.

Myron put aside the basket of groceries, took the quilting-frames to an empty corner, and set about her preparations for the weekly washing. The bound girl still stood motionless by the fire, and Mrs. Deans still talked; her husband was shifting uneasily in his chair, for her remarks were beginning to wander from the case in point, and her condemnations and criticisms were becoming too sweeping to be altogether pleasant, when, much to the relief of her hearers, Mrs. Deans' attention was distracted by the arrival of the ragman, with his noisy, rattling van, piled high with coarse, bulging sacks of canvas. Mrs. Deans assumed her sunbonnet, and went out to him. He was a man of sixty or so, thin, good-humored, and with what Mrs. Deans called, "An eye to the main chance." Perched high upon the seat of his old-fashioned blue van, he was exposed to all the variableness of the weather; but he took sunshine and rain in good part, and seemed little the worse, save that he was tanned to a fine mahogany tint.

He went regular rounds through the country, gathering rags and scrap-iron. His calling is a survival of the old classic system of barter. The interior of his van was filled with an array of pans and pails and all sorts of tinware; a drawer at the back held common cutlery, horn-handled knives and forks, and tin spoons, such as his customers used. With these wares he paid for the rags and old iron. Many a thousand pounds of each had he and his old black horse collected.

He had a faculty for gauging the weight of a bag of rags that was truly impressive. "That'll go thirty pound," he would say; then weighing it hastily, "Turned at thirty and a half," he would announce with an air of surprise at his own mistake. Then, by a quick fling, the bag would be skillfully bestowed upon the top of the van; his load was always one-sided, but never fell off.

Mrs. Deans always had rags for him, and invariably bought pie-plates.

"Who is that?" said he to Mrs. Deans, after the chaffering process was over, and she stood, pie-plates in hand, watching him put the wooden peg through the staple to keep the hasp tight. He had caught a glimpse of Myron Holder.

"That—oh, Jed Holder's Myron," returned Mrs. Deans, assuming the face with which she taught Sunday school.

"'Tis, eh? What do you have her for?"

"I feel a duty to have her here, but it goes ag'in me, Mr. Long—it does that; but there, we all have our cross and we must help along as well as we can. Are you going to call at old Mrs. Holder's? She takes it most terrible hard."

"Yes, I'll call there; it's a lucky job for the girl she's got such a backer as you, Mrs. Deans. 'Twould be a good thing if there was more like you. It beats all what wimmen is coming to these days! Who's the man?"

"Don't ask me—ask *her;* that's the only place I know to find out; she's that close, though! And stubborn! Even I, for all I've done for her, and put up with, don't know! No more does her grandmother. But I'll find out."

"Well, well—that's curious," said the ragman, by this time perched aloft again and shaking the reins over the high, lean haunches of his horse; "good day, Mrs. Deans; you have a fine place here."

"Good morning. When'll you be back? Be sure you call."

"I'll be round in a couple of months again. Good morning," he replied, as his van jolted away.

"It seems to me," said he, soliloquizing, "that Mrs. Deans has washed more'n she can hang out! Jed Holder's

daughter can keep her mouth shet if she makes up her mind to it; I knowed Jed."

This ragman had not gathered the rags of Jamestown for thirty years without acquiring some knowledge of the people. "I kin read 'em by their rags," he used to tell his wife.

He was justified in doubting Mrs. Deans' ability to perform the task she had set herself—to fathom Myron's secret.

"That girl of Jed Holder's has made a fine job of herself!" the ragman said to old Mr. Carroll, as he drove homeward in the evening.

"Yes," said old Carroll; "women are a bad lot, a bad, scheming lot."

"Oh, come, come; you'll be getting married to some young girl one of these fine days," retorted the astute ragman.

"I—no, sir; not such a fool," snorted the old man, highly pleased. "Will you come in and have a drop?"

The ragman would; they entered the house together, the black horse meantime reaching down to nibble at the last year's grass, through which the first tender blades of the new growth were pointing.

Presently the ragman emerged, looking much happier and warmer; the wind was chill in the evenings yet, and Mr. Carroll's "drop" meant a good, stiff glass of gin.

Mr. Carroll came to the door after him. "Mrs. Deans declares she'll find out, but the job will puzzle even her, I'll warrant," the ragman was saying as he climbed nimbly up over the front wheel.

"Trust her for that; women are all alike. 'Set a thief to catch a thief,'" replied his host with a sardonic chuckle. (If Mrs. Deans could have heard him!)

The ragman loudly evidenced his appreciation of this

fine wit, and departed, calling out, "Evening—good evening—you've got a fine, snug place here, Mr. Carroll."

His homeward way led through quiet country roads, and long grass-grown "concessions."

The promise of spring made sweet the air, and although the night felt gray and chill, it did not numb, as do autumn nights of the same temperature.

The ragman's house stood on the outskirts of a little town, and was dwarfed and overshadowed by the barn, which occupied the main portion of the lot. One little corner of this barn was devoted to the big black horse; the rest was given over to rags. If the rags are not sent to the mills as they are collected, they are "sorted," which means that buttons, hooks, and eyes are cut off, and the woollen separated from the cotton rags. The former are sent to the shoddy mills; the paper factories absorb the others.

The ragman's trade has its traditions and romances; and the tales of fortunes found by ragpickers are beautiful truths to all of their calling; so this ragpicker, like all others, carefully felt the pockets and linings of the garments that came to him. During his thirty years of ragpicking he had found one two-dollar bill, seven ten-cent pieces, eighteen five-cent bits, one pair of gloves and an average of one lead pencil a year—but he still hoped.

Finding a fortune in rags, however, is a little like trying to locate the pot of gold at the rainbow's foot.

Myron Holder had heard plainly the ragman's query and Mrs. Deans' reply. Old Henry Deans, blossoming forth like a snail out of its shell, as soon as his wife's back was turned, said with leering facetiousness, "Ah—a fellow askin' after you, Myron," and pointed his fist with a look that made the blood spring to the woman's cheeks and linger there, a painful blot as though the face had been

smitten. She bent over her tub in silence, her heart hot within her. The regard of such men and women as Myron Holder lived among may not seem of much moment to us, nor their criticisms of any import at all, but it must be remembered that they formed Myron Holder's world; and their verdict upon her was terrible, inasmuch as with them lay the power of inflicting the penalty they pronounced.

Mrs. Deans bustled in, rattling her pie-plates. Every one was at work and unhappy, so after scathing her husband with a contemptuous look, on general principles, she betook herself to the kitchen proper, and soon getting the quilting-frames into position, proceeded to "tie" her quilts, which process consisted in dotting their resplendent red and blue surfaces with fuzzy knots of yellow yarn.

That night, when Myron Holder went home, she thought for the first time, once or twice rebelliously, of the portion meted out to her; but that unaccustomed mood passed and left her in her normal condition of self-reproach.

It is perhaps true that martyrdom is a form of beatitude; but, if compulsory, it rarely has a spiritualizing effect. Myron Holder was condemned to endure all the "slings and arrows" that a spiteful, narrow-minded village can aim. She arose in the morning and ate her hasty breakfast to the sound of bitter words, directed with the unerring malignity of long-suppressed dislike, at last given an excuse for expression. She worked all day, subject to the taunts of a vulgar virago, the coarseness of that unlicked cub, Gamaliel, the intolerable leers and jibes of the half-paralyzed Henry Deans. She returned at night to be greeted by her grandmother's venomous reproaches. Doubtless she deserved all this—but her acceptance of it might have been different, for Myron Holder had come of

no slavish race of down-trodden serfs. She had sprung from a long line of sturdy English forbears, lowly indeed, but free and bold. It would scarcely be a matter for wonder had Myron Holder fought with her back against the wall, defied the world she knew, utterly—its narrow prejudices, cramped conventions, traditionary decencies; but she did not. At this time she neither rebelled nor struggled—she endured; so did Prometheus.

CHAPTER V.

"Oh, the waiting in the watches of the night!
In the darkness, desolation, and contrition and affright;
The awful hush that holds us shut away from all delight;
The ever-weary memory that ever weary goes,
Recounting ever over every aching loss it knows,
The ever-weary eyelids gasping ever for repose—
In the dreary, weary watches of the night!"

"The flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow dies;
All that we wish to stay
Tempts, and then flies.
What is this world's delight?
Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright."

ONE day, shortly after the ragman's call, old Mr. Carroll came to have a talk with Mr. Deans. He did this often. It was not that he had any particular liking for Henry Deans or his wife, but the forced inaction of the former left him unoccupied all day long, and Mr. Carroll dearly liked "to have his talk out" when once he commenced. As a prelude to the talk proper, they discussed for an hour or so the affairs of the village, the crops of

their neighbors, the scarcity of pasture and the great number of tramps. Into this part of the conversation Mrs. Deans entered heartily. After these matters were canvassed thoroughly, the men settled themselves more easily in their chairs, and took up the more serious business of the hour.

Now there were only two subjects that Mr. Carroll thoroughly enjoyed talking about—politics and war; the former he regarded as the "root of all evil," the latter as the only means of reform. Mr. Deans only cared to discuss religion and crops.

Each talked in his own strain about his own hobby, without regard to what his companion was saying. While one was speaking the other waited, absent-eyed, for the first pause for breath, when he promptly took up his parable where he had left off when forced to pause for breath himself. The one never heard what the other said, each being too much occupied in thinking what he should say next to bother about listening to any one else. They derived much of the same mutual benefit and amusement from these conversations as two dogs do when they race madly up and down opposite sides of a fence, barking at each other. Many learned arguments, held in high places, are conducted upon these same lines.

The sunny afternoon wore along. Mrs. Deans had yawned several times, yawned audibly and significantly; but her husband, in full cry after the errors of the Catholics and the bigotry of the Church of England, disregarded the danger signal, and went on his conversational way rejoicing. Mr. Carroll, winding his way through the intricacies of the bribery and corruption and scandals of the last election, was oblivious of her yawns, their meaning, and even—ungallant as it may seem—of her presence.

Gamaliel, coming in from his plough to refill his water-jug, looked slyly through the door at the trio.

"She's putting her ears back," said he to himself, with pleasurable anticipation of a row, as he looked at his mother. He waited a few moments in expectation of a crisis, but at the instant when his hopes were highest an interruption occurred in the arrival of Mrs. Wilson.

Mr. Carroll loathed Mrs. Wilson, a well-fed-looking but lugubrious woman, chronically aggrieved. From her own account, she had inherited and endured "all the ills the flesh is heir to," but nevertheless she was plump and comfortable-looking. Her dark eyes were bright, her red cheeks rosy, her nose a pug; her lips showed red against the whiteness of her false teeth—when the teeth were in her lips pouted, when the teeth were out her lips pursed.

Mrs. Wilson was somewhat perilously given over to vanities, and had fringe on her black merino dress and a white muslin rose in her black bonnet. She had her knitting with her, an index of her intention to stay for tea, and an encouragement to Mrs. Deans to insist that she should remain. Mrs. Wilson protested she had had no intention of staying, and Mrs. Deans insisted that she should stay. Mrs. Wilson's protestations continued all the while she was laying off her bonnet, and Mrs. Deans' persuasive eloquence flowed freely; finally, with a fine assumption of compulsion, Mrs. Wilson ceased protesting, and allowed herself, knitting in hand, to be led back to the dining-room.

By the time the two ladies emerged, Mr. Carroll was hobbling out of the gate and Mr. Deans was enjoying a long-deferred chew. The two women sat down opposite each other in rocking-chairs. Mrs. Wilson produced a black apron, which she donned, and then felt in her pocket for the goose-quill she carried to hold the end of her knitting needle, stuck it in her belt, and proceeded to turn the *heel of a carpet-warp* sock; at the same time to

give Mrs. Deans a full and particular account of her sufferings from erysipelas. Mrs. Deans herself had had some experience with that disease, having once seen a woman in St. Ann's who was bald from its effects.

Mrs. Wilson's needles clicked; Mrs. Deans' waxed thread hummed as she vigorously sewed carpet-rags; a distant thud-thud told that Myron Holder was churning.

The sun began to sink. Suddenly Mrs. Wilson dropped her hands and her knitting into her lap, and asked, with an explosive abruptness only excusable as an indication of the startling character of the question:

"Say, Jane—I want to ask you something! Has Myron Holder named her young one?"

Mrs. Deans struck one hand into the other.

"Well, it beats all! I never! If you'll believe me, I don't know."

"I just wondered whether she had or not, but I never saw you to ask, or if I saw you I forgot, and I didn't hear tell of its being named yet. Now what do you suppose, Jane, speaking confidential between ourselves, and knowing it'll go no further—if you was asked, now, what would you say she'd call it, if 'twas put to you?"

"Well, Marian," replied Mrs. Deans, with the air of a baffled astrologer, "since you ask me plain, I'll tell you one thing—I can see as far through a ladder as most people, and if I go falling it ain't through going about with my eyes shut; but all I know about it is one thing, and that ain't two; whatever Myron Holder calls the young one she won't call it Jed, for that old Mrs. Holder won't allow at no rate—for no favor. Not that Myron said anything about it; that ain't her way. She's close—terrible close is Myron, and deep beyond belief. But old Mrs. Holder says —and what she says she'll stick to, being stubborn and *fixed in her notions*—she says, 'No naming of such brats

after my son.' No—not if Myron asks on bended knee, Mrs. Holder won't give in."

"But say, Jane," hazarded Mrs. Wilson, as one who advances an improbable and wild suggestion, "supposing Myron Holder don't ask, but just *does* it? Do you suppose she'd dare?"

"'Tain't hardly likely," returned Mrs. Deans, looking judicial; "that would be pretty serious, even for Myron Holder. But I don't know; she's bad clean through—that's easy enough seen; why she makes the greatest time over that young one you ever seen. Why, Mrs. Warner told me that the other Sunday, when she went to Holder's well for a pail of water, that the house being very quiet, she went and looked in the windows, knowing old Mrs. Holder was out to Disney's for milk. She couldn't see nothing in the front room nor the kitchen, but in the bedroom there she seen Myron Holder with the boy. The boy was asleep, and she was kneeling by the bed, talking away to the sleeping child!—'s good's praying to it, Mrs. Warner said."

"I've no patience with such goings on as them," said Mrs. Wilson, clicking her needles agitatedly. "I should think she'd be ashamed to act up like that, considering all that's come and gone."

"Well, you'd think so," agreed Mrs. Deans, winding up her ball of rags. "But there, Marian! There's no use talking, her kind don't care for nothing."

"Well, it's to be hoped she don't throw no slurs on any decent fellow, like your Male or my Homer," said Mrs. Wilson, with dismal foreboding in her voice. "It would be just like her to pick on some fine name. But I warn her of one thing: slurs is something I can't abide and won't put up with."

"Nor *me, Marian,* nor me," said Mrs. Deans, her spirit

rising in anticipation of the imaginary fray. "Let Myron Holder call her brat Gamaliel, and I'll let her know for once, in her life, that respectable people has their rights. Just only let her, once, and that's all. If I don't show her pretty prompt what's what, blame me!"

"Well, 'twould be a most terrible slur on any fellow, that's all I can say," returned Mrs. Wilson.

After tea Homer Wilson called for his mother and drove her away, her white muslin rose nodding above the black barége veil she tied across her forehead to ward off neuralgia, her hands clasping lovingly a bottle of liniment distilled from dried "smartweed," which Mrs. Deans had bestowed upon her. Mrs. Deans watched their departure from the veranda; presently she voiced her reflections aloud:

"Marian don't crack up Homer as much as she used to do; guess that shoe pinches a bit. Well, served her right! Nobody but a fool gives away his clothes before he's done with them! They shouldn't have been so smart giving Homer the deed."

"No, I don't hold with doing that. Don't catch me doing any such business, not I," said Mr. Deans' voice from the kitchen.

Mrs. Deans jerked her shoulders impatiently, and took herself and her meditations out of her husband's hearing. She was gone some little time, having walked down to the pasture to look at the lambs. As she entered the cook-house she murmured to herself, "I can't make my mind up to it somehow, but she was anxious, was Marian, terrible anxious about the name—Homer Wilson."

Homer Wilson and his mother drove homeward. They passed Myron Holder entering the gate of her home. She had taken off her sunbonnet and held it by the strings, as *she fastened* the gate. Her hair, loosened and roughened,

was massed about her head in such a way as to form a soft, shadowy background, from which the pale oval of her face shone forth almost startlingly.

"Guess Mrs. Deans is taking her money's worth out of Myron Holder," said Homer after they passed. "She looks mighty tired out."

"Oh, goodness, Homer," said his mother, "don't take up with that girl. 'Tired out!' Serve her right if she is! It's pure charity Jane Deans' having her; and as for stubbornness and badness, Jane says she can't be beat. I guess her old grandmother has a tough time of it! Old folks has a poor chance when young ones get the whip-hand. Give—give—and when you've given all you've got you're no more good! Well, time's short here any way, and a good thing it is! No pleasure after one gets old—only burdens on other people." Here Mrs. Wilson sniffed loudly, and ostentatiously wiped away an imaginary tear.

Homer's face burned in the dusk; his heart rose hot against the reflection his mother's speech was meant to cast upon him. But he made no answer; he was used to such things; they drove on without further speech. The loose links in the horses' traces jingled; their hoof-beats sounded soft on the sandy road. They drew near the house before Mrs. Wilson spoke again; then she said briskly: "Homer, don't go speaking to Myron Holder if you meet her; she's a dangerous girl."

"She looks it," said Homer, with a touch of sarcasm. "I don't think I'll be hurt by passing a good day with her, though."

"That's right—I might have known as much. Get mixed up with her next, as if I hadn't had enough trouble," whined his mother.

Homer was getting exasperated. The knowledge that he had that very morning passed Myron Holder in absent-

minded silence added to the irritation of his mood. His mother's persistent misconstruction of his motives and actions was at times almost unbearable. He answered out of pure perversity: "She's the best looking girl in the village, by long odds; and as for not speaking to her, I fancy the women do plenty of 'passing by on the other side' business without the men helping them. You won't find many men, I reckon, unwilling to speak to Myron Holder."

A strange conviction of the absolute truth of what he was saying smote across his mind, and suddenly Myron Holder's pale face seemed to show out of the gloom before him, as he had seen it a little while before against the dark background of her hair. His mother almost groaned aloud; a dreadful thought flittered momentarily through her mind, but Homer was already pulling up the horses.

He helped her out carefully, and she entered the house absorbed in peevish self-pity.

Old Mr. Wilson was ready to receive her and eager to hear the "news." When Homer finished attending to his horses and came into the house, he found they had already retired. He heard the murmur of his mother's voice, broken only by a sharp exclamation or a short interrogation from his father. He blew out the lamp and sat down at the open window, laying his head on his hands. The frogs in the pond were uttering their weird and dismal note. No other sound has a more melancholy echo, a more desolate tone. An earthy breath of wind was wafted from across the newly ploughed land near the house. In the sunshine the aroma from fresh furrows is sweeter than the breath of sweet grass; at night it brings the odor of the charnel.

The wind died down; it was very still and dark. The dew fell. Presently Homer Wilson rose, and, still in the

dark, found his way softly upstairs. His thick brown hair was laden with the night damps, but even the first heavy dews of spring do not leave long, glistening, smarting furrows on the cheeks—do not fall in slow-wrung, scalding drops upon clinched hands, do not linger in salt traces about the lips they touch.

When Homer Wilson avowed conversion in the little Methodist Church, his mother confided to Mrs. Deans that she was exceedingly glad thereat. "I can let him go to the city with an easier mind, now that I know he's got religion," she said. Homer had gone to the anxious-seat the night before, during the revival meeting, had been prayed over, and sung over, and had avowed, in a few jerky, hesitating sentences, that "he felt better—happier —there is a load off my mind—I—" But his testimony had been interrupted at this point, greatly to his own relief and his mother's wrath, by enthusiastic Sister Warner beginning to sing, in a high, shrill treble:

"Once I was blind,
But now I can see;
The Light of the World is Jesus."

Homer retired from the meeting feeling a little dazed. He knew he had done what was expected of him, and believed it was the right thing to do, but was a bit confused as to the impulse which had prompted him to take the step.

The next morning he started for the commercial college, where he was about to take a course. He was alert to the possibilities of life, and was clear-headed enough to see that without education his chances were *nil*.

He had gone, winter after winter, to the village school, and had a wide reputation among the villagers as a mathematician.

"It's pretty hard to fool Homer Wilson on figgers," was the general verdict.

He was too progressive to dream of spending his life in that little hamlet, so he saved all his earnings, and at last had enough to cover the low expenses of a two-year course at the business college—an institution which, among its numerous advantages, promised "to secure good situations for such of the students as shall obtain our diploma."

When Homer Wilson started from the village, he was a good specimen of the country Hercules; tall, sinewy, resolute, with unflinching will and bulldog courage. His conversion, if it had not sprung from his inmost soul or stirred the deepest depths of his heart, had at least awakened and strengthened his better resolutions; his mind was eager to receive the knowledge that he knew meant power. His hopes were high, his heart and temper generous.

He met *Her* shortly after he commenced his course. Her brother was attending the college and took Homer to his home one night. Homer thought her perfection, for his standard of comparison was not high. She had fluffy yellow hair, and pretty eyes, and pretty ways, and pretty speeches galore. She was winning and cordial, and he thought her absurd questions about country ways and country doings very entertaining. She was bright and quick and quite charmed this keen young man, who, for all his shrewdness, proved an easy prey to these trivial acts which girls of her caste exercise so unsparingly. He confided to her all his ambitions, and she listened eagerly.

Perhaps he gave her a rather too glowing account of the farm at home. The peaches and grapes were, perhaps, *hardly so plentiful*, and certainly were not so easily ob-

tained. The harvests were, perhaps, not quite so golden, the garden perhaps not so lovely, as he depicted it, nor his father so admirable, nor his mother so benevolently kind to everybody. But he had left home for the first time, and, after all, despite his ambitions, his heart was yet in the country, with the fields, the sun, the birds and the trees.

Under these circumstances a man is prone to forget the tedious process of planting and nursing and cultivating the peach trees until they are fit for fruiting—to overlook the ploughing and sowing and harrowing, and the long days of toil before the fields "whiten to the harvest," and to think and speak of both fruit and grain as springing, with all the beauty of spontaneity, from the gracious Mother Earth. And his listener, if she be a selfish, shallow creature, unthinking and unheeding, is prone to think only of results, and not at all of the toil they represent.

So life slipped along with Homer Wilson, studying and loving and writing home. Then came a summer day when he took *Her* for a day's trip to his home in Jamestown. His mother had outdone herself preparing country dainties. It was the time of strawberries, and there were strawberries and cream, and strawberry shortcake, and crullers, and pies, and boiled ham, and the sun was shining, and *She* fluttered about, genuinely pleased with many things and affecting to be delighted by everything.

Old Mr. Wilson had been at his best. Mrs. Wilson was urbane in a new dress, and Homer strode about, showing *Her* the farm, erect and happily excited. It was the halcyon day of his life. In the evening there was the trip back to the city, Homer taking care of the basket of strawberries his mother had bestowed upon *Her*.

That night she promised to marry him. He wrote to his people, and *his* mother returned a somewhat unintel-

tionally lugubrious epistle, conveying their good wishes and consent.

Weeks and months sped, and Homer had never been home since that day. His old people did not take that amiss, for travelling, as they knew, cost money.

But there came a day when his course was completed, the coveted diploma bestowed upon him, and a situation secured for him as bookkeeper in a lumber-yard, at thirty-five dollars a month. He made up his mind to go home for a day or two before starting work. He reached the village elate—fortune seemed within his grasp.

His father was surly and harassed-looking; his mother's face looked older and with genuine lines of trouble about the lips, far more significant than the peevish wrinkles of self-pity that creased her brow.

He soon learned the cause of these things. The mortgage, which had always seemed as much a matter of course to him as the taxes or the road-work, was about to be foreclosed. The man who had lent them the money would not renew it; he hinted that he feared for his interest, as it seemed there was no young man to take hold of the place, and in the event of the property deteriorating he feared for his principal.

The old people before this dilemma seemed numbed. They could think of no expedient, and were apparently incapable of deciding what course to pursue.

Homer listened to it all in sick wonder that he had not been told, rejoicing inwardly that he had cost them nothing at least for two years back, though he also realized with bitterness that he had helped them none. He went to his old room that night to fight a hard battle with himself, and to conquer—to give up his ambitions, which, humble as they seem, were yet great to him; to relinquish the joy *of seeing Her daily*; to return to the old, hopeless struggle

of striving to make ends meet, to bend his energies to the circumscribed field of making the most of the few acres of the old farm; to come back and be called a failure by his friends; to have to wait a long, long time before he could call Her "wife." But while that last idea held the bitterest thought of all, in it also lay the kernel of the hope which was to keep his heart alive. He felt he had a sure and certain hope of a happy future, no matter how long deferred, and he remembered, with a pang of pity, that his father and mother had only a past.

His brothers and sisters were all married long since, and each had struggle enough to keep the wolf from the door. No help from any one but himself could relieve his old people.

The dawn found him resolved. He told his father and mother at the breakfast-table. They were both delighted, but did not know very well how to express it. To a stranger's mind there might have been some doubt as to whether they appreciated the sacrifice or not. They did not in full. No one save, perhaps, a woman who loved him could have known the magnitude of his renunciation.

His father and he went that day to see the old man who held the mortgage. He was a shrewd old miser, and was fain to secure himself in every way against anxiety and loss. He insisted that the new mortgage should be made out in Homer's name. He wanted this open-browed, strong, resolute young man for his debtor, and not the vacillating old man, who looked as if no responsibility would trouble him long. So the farm was transferred to Homer's name, and the mortgage also.

Homer resumed his old life unfalteringly. He wrote and told *Her* all about his change of plans, and she replied to his letters regularly. Her letters were not very satisfying; women of her fibre are not usually very fascinating on

paper. So Homer felt trebly the sacrifice he was making, for he attributed none of his sense of loss to the lack of real feeling in her letters. On the contrary, he thought those letters, with their stilted beginning and spidery writing, the sweetest of all epistles; and thought to himself how altogether lovely she was, when even such letters as these left him unsatisfied and with heart-hunger unappeased.

Homer was not one to put his hand to the plough and then draw back. He threw into his work all the energy of his resolute will, and backed it by the severest physical toil he was capable of. It was up-hill and disheartening work, but he toiled on. He had disappointments enough and to spare, but he wrote them all down to *Her*, and forgot them when he read that she was "so sorry."

He had progressive ideas which sometimes worried him sorely, for it was trying to see others availing themselves of modern appliances for cultivating, etc., while Homer felt bound to struggle on with the old implements his father possessed, which called for double the expenditure of labor and time, and even then did not yield satisfactory results.

In the spring, too, it took the heart out of him to walk the rows of his peach orchard and find a third of the trees killed, girdled by the teeth of the field-mice. Homer's heart almost failed him when he discovered this last mishap, for he was oppressed by the knowledge that he could have prevented it. It was true that he could not afford the expensive shields of metal for his trees that some of his neighbors had, but if, immediately after that heavy snowstorm of last winter, he had gone out and tramped the snow tightly round each tree, then they would not have been girdled; for the snow, if left undisturbed, never *clings close to a* peach tree; there is always a space

between, and the mice creep round and round the tree in this space, gnawing it to the height of the snow. The peach trees next the fence, where the snow had drifted, were girdled completely up to a height of three or four feet.

Homer had visited *Her* in the winter. The week after the heavy snowstorm had been spent with her. His mother reminded him of this, and he flung out of the house angrily. He was fairly sick over the loss of his trees, and to have anything cold said about Her was too much. He wrote *Her* all about it; perhaps in his desperate longing for sympathy, loving sympathy and comprehension, he depicted the disaster as even more serious than it really was.

He waited for her letter eagerly. It came. Her frivolous, mercenary soul had taken fright. She sheltered herself behind the old excuse for disloyalty—worn threadbare by women of all stations. She wrote that she felt she "did not love him as she should if she was to be his wife."

He had sent the little Home-boy to the Post-Office for the letter; he brought it to the field where Homer was planting out tomato-plants. Homer Wilson read his letter twice or thrice, put it carefully in its envelope, and then safely in his pocket. He went on with his task—slowly—slowly, though, with none of the tremulous haste with which he had been exhausting himself for months. He packed the roots with soil; it was some relief, the hard, resistent pressure of the earth; there was something left to battle against, if nothing left to fight for. So he continued his row, feeling a fierce wrath if one of the shaky little plants would not stand straight, and hushing the Home-boy's chatter with a terrible, pale look.

He completed his task, and went about his other work in an atmosphere of enforced calm that was torture. By

some chance none of his tasks that day called for any output of physical strength. It was a day of small things, trivial tasks which maddened him by their helpless need for patience, not strength.

But the weariest hours pass, and night fell over the village as a veil. Then he wrote to Her a few straightforward, manly lines, setting her free; telling her she had acted rightly if she did not love him. Then he lay down for another night of poignant thought. He recalled Her visit to the farm, and remembered how impatient he had felt when his mother maundered on about sending back the basket the strawberries went in. He had felt a little ashamed of his mother's thrift just then.

When the morning came Homer was ready for work, but there had been a distinct decadence in him during the night that was past. He had no longer anything to live for but money; he rose to search for this only good with eager, greedy eyes. For this poor countryman had come of a long race of penurious, grasping men and women, and that mercenary craving for money and land had been latent in his nature since his birth. When he went to the business college it stirred within him vaguely, and might then have developed, but better ambitions ousted it. But these aspirations were gone, and in their place flourished —grown to its full height in a single night—the Upas Tree of Greed.

He told his people next day. His mother promptly said, "I knowed how it would be! A big-feeling, handless creature, idle and good for nothing! With her airified ways and her notions; I told you so all along, Homer," etc., etc. But Homer, ere even the second word was spoken, was out of the house and striding along with black brows to his tomatoes. The row he had planted the day before *looked limp;* by night they were yellow—withered—dead.

In replanting them he found each stalk broken clean off below the earth; he had indulged his strength too much in packing the earth about them. Day by day the change in him went on—gradually, almost imperceptibly, but startlingly apparent, had any one contrasted the Homer of the present with the man of the past. It was very pitiful. Worst of all, he was conscious himself of the change, but could not analyze it, so could do nothing to arrest the atrophy of his soul.

He began to prosper by fits and starts; later more steadily. He had a balance at the end of the summers now, and invested it in better stock, new implements and fine varieties of fruit. He hid his aching heart under an offensively blustering manner, and was so morbidly afraid of any one knowing his secret that he was too carelessly gay—too full of pointless jests. Often, after a gathering of the village young people, he strolled home under the stars, dazed and wondering, his throat harsh with much speech, his head aching with tuneless laughter. Was he really the man who had chattered on so a few minutes since? he asked himself. And the other young people said, among themselves, "Homer Wilson does like to show off so!"

It was an anguish to him when he saw, now and then, a young man leave the village, win what he considered success, and come back smiling, content, and well dressed, for a brief holiday; then back to the world outside again.

His temper became irascible. When his horses were refractory he was unmerciful; but after any outbreak against a dumb animal his stifled manhood rose against this last, worst outrage against it. But the horses did not recall the extra feeding and light work as they did the blow, and they shrank and shivered and started nervously when he approached. He noted this, and it cut

him to the heart, or stung him into dull wrath against them, as his mood was.

The farm did better and better, and well it might; all the honest and generous part of a man's nature was being sunk in it. He began to pay the principal of the loan in instalments; at last he had the farm clear.

His brothers and sisters murmured against him. Homer had stolen their birthright, they whispered; he had got hold of the farm just when the hard times were past; he had wheedled the old people into giving it all to him, they said, and they each and every one had worked as hard as he had, and besides he had all his own way, while they had had to work under the old man's orders.

So the boys came home with their families, and paid long visits and impressed upon the old man how Homer had "bested him." And the girls returned with their children, and condoled with their mother. They departed, leaving the old man morose, irritable and repining, the old woman in tearful self-pity; and Homer saw it all and smiled grimly, but said no word.

So the old people saw grudgingly his hard-won success, although they shared it fully, and spoke of their other children always with the prefix "poor," as if contrasting Homer's prosperous and happy lot with theirs.

He had, after all, a grim sense of humor, and this Jacob-like light in which his family viewed him filled him with sneering mirth. Verily they were a miserable tribe of Esaus. But the mirth died out at last, leaving a residuum of rage against his kin, who so persistently misjudged him, and one bitter night he lay and cursed the resolution which had brought him back to rescue his old people from the slough of despond.

With the acknowledgment of this regret, the disintegration of his soul would seem to be complete.

CHAPTER VI.

"And oh, the carven mouth, with all its great
Intensity of longing frozen fast
In such a smile as well may designate
The slowly murdered heart, that, to the last,
Conceals each newer wound, and back at fate
Throbs Love's eternal lie:—'Lo, I can wait!'"

"And all that now is left me, is to bear."

THAT night in the darkness, Homer Wilson's lip curled as he thought of his mother's too ready fears for him, nor could he refrain a sneer at the idea of Mrs. Deans' disinterested benevolence. But after that, he set himself to slumber, but in vain. Sleep, that

"Comfortable bird,
That broodeth o'er the troubled sea of the mind
Till it is hush'd and smooth,"

would not bestow its benison upon his tired brain and weary heart, for he was haunted by the memory of Myron Holder's hopeless face.

It had been, these past years, no unusual thing for this poor countryman to lie the long nights through, tortured by the vision of a woman's face: but it had ever been a fair, pretty, laughing face that had thus enthralled him within the bounds of painful thought; a face that by its brightness cast a shadow upon every other vision that strove to tempt him to forget; a face he had worshipped, and thought on tenderly, as his own; a face he had striven to imagine old; a face he had even dared to think of, dead, and always—always as his own precious possession.

But this night his reverie was no selfish one of bygone bliss, or present pain, or future hopelessness; it was wholly

of a woman's pale face, carven cameo-like against a night of hair, and exceeding sorrowful. He recalled Myron Holder as she had been, a plump and pretty girl; one whom all the boys in Jamestown had liked, but who had been kept rigidly away from all the village gatherings by her grandmother. He recalled the cadence of her voice, softened always and made richer than the strident Jamestown voice by the English accent she had inherited. He remembered having heard her singing once as he drove past the little hop-clad cottage; as he thought of it, the words came back to him in part:

> "Where the bee sucks, there suck I;
> In a cowslip's bell I lie.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Merrily, merrily, shall I live now
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

He recollected how a rippling laugh prolonged the song. He had caught a glimpse of her that day; she was standing beneath a cherry tree—her upstretched arms held a blossomed bough, and she gave it little jerks in time to her singing—the white petals of the cherry blooms showered down upon her hair in fragrant snow. Her grandmother called her in—scolding her as an "idle maid"; Myron had fled into the house still laughing, and with the cherry blooms clinging to her dark hair; and as Homer drove on, he thought what a light-hearted girl she was. That was in the first year of his sacrifice—now he caught his breath as he mentally compared the girl beneath the cherry tree finishing her song with thrills of laughter with the woman standing mute in the moonlight as he had so late beheld her.

How utterly incongruous it seemed to think of Myron *Holder now in* connection with that heart-whole girl.

How much she had lost! That day when he heard her laughter and her singing, he had compared Myron for a moment to *Her*,—now, alas! she was more like him. This set him off into another train of thought: How much he too had lost! He began to wonder dimly if he had been guilty of any cowardice. A phrase of Jed Holder's came back to him; he was full of trite saws, that little English broom-maker, and when any one lost their courage before misfortune, he used to say they "let their bone go with the dog." Had not he—Homer—let slip some of his self-respect before the loss of his love? He hazily perceived the difference between self-respect and self-seeking, but he could not condemn himself just yet; he began to dissuade himself from this dissatisfaction with himself; he recounted his achievements—the paying off the mortgage—restocking the farm—planting the new orchard—and reshingling the barn—sinking the cistern—his successful experiments—his prudential management—his economy; he marshalled all these arguments against the feeble voice that strove to speak of a narrowed mind, a hardened heart, a bitter spirit, and for the nonce stilled it, only stilled it, however; happily for Homer Wilson, it was not yet stifled utterly.

It was pitiable, but natural in one so generous as in reality Homer was, that he should overlook completely his real claims to credit: his patience with his whining mother, his generosity to his father, his tolerance of his ungrateful brothers and sisters. He attained a quasi-self-content after a time, but still tossed restlessly. At last he could endure it no longer; he sprang up, dressed, and going to his window, drew aside the curtain and looked forth toward the village. The dusk of night had given way to the cold darkness of the hour before dawn; as he looked, a dull yellow light illumined the panes of one

low window, then it faded out to reappear outside the house; it went (for at that distance its feeble glow did not reveal the hand that bore it)—it went waveringly along some hundred yards, then was lowered, and vanished. There was a space of darkness, then the light was raised, and proceeded back to the house; it vanished round the corner, gleamed a moment from the window, and again journeyed forth in the dusk, again was lowered —again lost to sight—again its feeble gleam traced its pathway toward the dwelling.

Homer Wilson knew by the location what house sent forth this wandering light, and following a swift impulse, ran downstairs, pulled on an old pair of soft shoes, let himself out quietly, and sped along the highway to the village.

The streets were silent, the dwellings dark, Jamestown still slumbered. As he reached the house where the light was, he entered the garden through a gap in the dilapidated fence, walked along in the darkest shadow until he came to the corner at the point where the light's journeyings ceased, and stood there hidden by an overgrown bush of privet; and then he saw the light come forth: it was a queer old lantern Myron Holder carried, one, indeed, brought from England. It had lighted her mother's happy footsteps along Kentish lanes; but how differently that long dead Myron had sped! "Merry heart makes light foot," her husband used to say; alas, that their child should lack that happy impetus! Myron advanced slowly, unsteadily almost—the four little panes of the lantern lighted dimly by the end of a tallow candle. She carried in her other hand a large pail.

Homer could not understand her errand, creeping forth thus in the sleeping night. She came nearer and nearer, and at last he understood.

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"YOU HAVE COME!"

She reached the old well (the best well in Jamestown, and the deepest); set down her lantern, and taking the handle of the windlass began to lower the bucket; creak —creak went the wooden windlass; at last there came a faint splash, and Myron painfully rewound the chain; she emptied the well bucket into her pail, lifted it (throwing, as Homer thought, all her physical strength into the lifting of the heavy pail, and seeming to move by the force of her will alone), and bending far over, proceeded to the house. He traced her footsteps by the lantern's gleam to the kitchen door; he heard the plash of water, and then once more the weary light emerged. Myron Holder was carrying the water for her grandmother's washing before starting for her mile's walk and subsequent day's work at Deans'. Homer Wilson's familiarity with household affairs told him this—whispered also something of her motherhood and its demands upon her, with which this cruel toil so ill accorded.

He was only a young countrymen, rough and not refined to careful phrase.

"It's damnable!" he said below his breath, and ground his heel into the sand.

As she approached the well a second time, he waited till she set down her lantern and pail, and then stepped forth from the shadow—a tall, strong figure in the gloom, uttering her name softly:

"Myron—Myron Holder!"

For a heart-beat she stood rigid, then her hands clasped: an instant thus she stood, and then stretched forth her arms with an infinitude of yearning helplessness, an agony of tenderness and pleading, a world of relief in the gesture.

"You have come," she said.

In all his *after-life*, Homer Wilson never forgot the

awful accent in which these words—meant-to-be-welcoming words to the man for whom she had suffered so much—were uttered. Horrified at the cruel mistake he had caused, he stood for a moment motionless; the next, he had sprung forward—for Myron Holder fathomed her mistake and fell without a sound.

Homer caught her before she touched the ground, and holding her in his arms, distraught with self-reproach, strove to awaken her by calling her name.

"Myron—Myron," he whispered, with all the intensity of suppressed feeling, "Myron—Myron."

Her eyes unclosed; she did not stir, nor flush, nor speak. She only looked at him out of eyes which were terrible in their tragic despair; eyes which seemed to accuse him of his manhood, that rendered him akin to her betrayer.

As Homer Wilson looked upon that pallid face, which the wan light of dawn illumined palely, his soul was suddenly smitten with self-contempt. What was the grief before which he had abased himself? What was it to endure beside open shame? Life had seemed to him almost insupportable, endurable only because he felt he had not merited the pain. What must it be to this woman, knowing she had bought contempt at the price of her own folly?

He recalled with what morbid care he had concealed the pangs he felt; how he had dreaded lest any eye discern his pain. What must it be to endure, not only sorrow and desertion and betrayal, but to endure it all openly; to meet in every eye a question, to hear on every lip a sneer, to know that every heart held scorn?

This is the doom that has driven hermits to the desert, that has tempted women to—

"From the world's bitter wind,
Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb."

These thoughts did not formulate themselves in his brain; they rushed upon him—instantaneous impressions—and vanished, leaving ineffable compassion in his heart, as he looked at the anguished face of Myron Holder. She was weakly trying to steady herself, and at last said in a lifeless voice, "I can stand alone now."

"Forgive me, Myron," said Homer, too much moved to feel any awkwardness; "forgive me—I frightened you."

"No," she said, "you did not frighten me; I thought ——" She paused.

"You thought——" He began, but hesitated.

"I thought you were *he*," she said, in breathless tones. Homer shuddered at the inflection of the words. In such accents might one acknowledge Death's dominion over one well-beloved. He threw off the chill at his heart and caught her hands.

"Myron," he said, "who is he?"

"I cannot tell you," she answered.

"Tell me," he urged; "tell me, and be he far or near, high or low, I will bring him to you."

"I cannot tell you," she repeated. Then for once moved beyond her self-control, "Oh, that I could!"

"Why can't you?" he asked hotly. "It is but common justice—let him bear his part."

"I promised," she replied simply, regaining her calm, the momentary glow of impatience dying out of her voice.

"Promised!" he echoed. "What's a promise given to *him* worth? Nothing—absolutely nothing. Promised! He did some fine promising, I dare swear. A promise to him!"

"I promised," she said again; then pushing back her head a little that she might look him in the face (for she was hardly of the common height of women), she went on: "I promised, and I will keep my promise; he will

come, and I can wait." In an instant her head sank. Her own words had brought before her a terrible mirage of what that waiting meant. He let fall her hands, and stepped back a pace. The action seemed to break the bond that had held at bay the memory of the world. Constraint fell upon Homer Wilson, and Myron's face burned in the dusky light.

"Did you want anything?" she asked in uncertain tones.

"No," he answered. "I saw your light from the window at home, and I came to see what work was going on so early."

"I always do what I can before I go to Mrs. Deans'," she said; "this is wash-day."

"You will kill yourself," he cried angrily. "What's your grandmother thinking of?"

Myron's head sank. "I deserve it all, you know," she said. "I——"

"You've no call to kill yourself," retorted Homer hotly. "Mrs. Deans is an old wretch, and your grandmother's a——"

"She's good to my baby," said Myron, checking his speech with a gesture. He recalled the child's existence, and, moved by an odd impulse, said gently:

"How is your child, Myron?"

She glanced at him with a gratitude so intense that he flushed and moved uneasily—as one accredited with a worthy deed he has not done.

"Oh, so well," she said. "He——" She paused, her face flaming. "Oh, do go——"

"Let me carry that pailful for you?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"No—no—do go!" she returned.

Both were now painfully constrained and eager to be *alone.*

"Well, I may as well be going, then," said Homer; and turning, made toward the gap in the fence, through which he had entered the garden. Once on the street, he quickly ran across the two streets of the village, and made his way through the fields, reaching his own barns just as his mother came to the kitchen door. She was looking toward the village, and saying shrilly to her husband:

"What did I tell you? Up and gone at this time! Fine doings these, I must say! Oh, I knowed it by the way he spunked up last night when I jest was giving him a hint to look out for her. I tell ye no such woman as that sets her foot in these doors; no, not if he laws on it. I tell ye——"

"Did you want me, mother?" asked Homer, showing himself at the stable-door, curry-comb and brush in hand.

"Oh, you're there, be ye?" said his mother, with a gasp of surprise.

"Yes," said Homer; "do you want me?"

"No; oh, no. I was just looking at the morning," said his mother, and vanished.

"Just got back in time," soliloquized Homer, contemptuously, as he went back to his work.

Left alone, Myron Holder stood a moment motionless. Then she took a few steps forward, into the shadow of the bush that but lately had held for her such cruel delusion. The mists of the morning that still lingered about the bush parted at her passage and clung round her, chill shreds of vapor.

The evanescent flush died out of her face; her eyes were dazed with pain—she locked her hands (stained with the rust of the windlass chain) and wrung them cruelly; now she pressed her quivering lips together—now they parted in shuddering respirations. How many tides of hope had swelled within her heart! How stony were

the shores on which they had spent themselves! How salt the memory of their floods! But never a wave of them all had risen so high as this one, which had swept her forward to the very haven of hope only to leave her fast upon the sands of despair.

She looked from side to side, with pitiable helplessness in her eyes, over the desolate garden. Each bush seemed a mocking sentinel appointed to watch her misery; nay, to her stricken heart each seemed the abiding place of some new cheat that in time would issue forth to delude and torture her. Unfalling tears gathered in her eyes; she let her face fall in her hands and breathed forth a name—

> "Like the yearning cry of some bewildered bird
> Above an empty nest";

but more softly than any plaint of bird was that name uttered, whispered so faintly that no cadence of its sound trembled even amidst the leaves that brushed her down-bent head.

Presently Myron Holder stood erect, her face masked by a patience more poignant than pain, more sublime than sorrow, more dreadful than despair.

Not all heroic souls are cast in heroic shapes. There was something in this woman's hard-wrought hands, and simple garb, and weary eyes, and tender mouth—nay, in the undefinable meekness of her attitude, that belied her courage. She filled her pail and bore it to the house, setting her face as resolutely toward her fate as she set her hand to carrying the heavy pail; and, heavy as her burden was, she rebelled no more against bearing it than she did against the weight of the pail that she herself had filled.

> "Earth has seen
> Love's brightest roses on the scaffold bloom,
> *Mingling* with freedom's fadeless laurels there."

But easier indeed were it to lay Love's roses in full blossom on a scaffold than to cherish them, as this woman did and other women have done, in the wastes of a betrayed trust—their blossoms dyed a frightful scarlet by the blood of a breaking heart. Love's roses grow in bitter soil ofttimes; their petals are soon spent, but their thorns are amaranthine.

CHAPTER VII.

"We rest—a dream has power to poison sleep;
We rise—one wandering thought pollutes the day."

"Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity
Until death tramples it to fragments."

"THE silent workings of the dawn" were past, and the whole sky pearled to an exquisite soft grayness when Myron Holder set out that day to go to Mrs. Deans'. The road swam dizzily before her; the snake fence zig-zagged wildly; the trees whirled round; the very stones appeared as if rolling over and over in awkward gambols; the wayside cows loomed gigantic to her uncertain vision. Her head throbbed heavily—her knees trembled; the physical reaction following supreme mental effort had set in, and her nerves, denied outward expression of the strain put upon them, were racking her frame sorely. She persevered, however, holding a wavering course from one side of the road to the other; at last she reached the little graveyard of Jamestown, wedged in between the farms of Mr. White and Mr. Deans. Its picket-fence was garlanded with *long trails* of the native virgin-bower clematis,

just putting forth its first leaf-buds. The hepaticas, their blossoms past, showed circular clumps of broad, green leaves, standing erect on downy stalks over the prostrate copper-colored ones of last year; the blood-root had lost all its white petals, and its spear-pointed seed-pods and single, broad, green leaves stood in thick masses, like miniature stands of arms, spear and shield; but the trilliums were nodding their triune-leaved blossoms; the wild phlox swayed daintily its cluster of fragile azure blooms; the meadow violets were clustered in dark-blue masses; the bracken ferns were uncoiling their fuzzy fronds; the May apples (mandrake) were pointing through the mellow soil, like so many small wax candles. Now and then a pungent odor came to her as she trod upon the fresh-springing pennyroyal, or bruised the stems of the mint that grew everywhere.

She was late already, as she knew, but was moved to go to see her father's sleeping-place. She went slowly between the graves, carefully avoiding treading on any of them. Her father had told her of the ill-luck that follows the foot that treads upon a grave and the hand that casts away bread. By what fearful sacrilege had this woman purchased her fate?

Her eyes were clearing now; and as she stood beside her father's grave, she looked upon it steadily enough. She felt a rapt sense of his presence—he had been very good to her in his absent-minded way. If he had lived! The woman found herself grateful that he died before. She rested her thoughts here to ask herself a question: If her father had lived, would she have lost herself? She held her breath for an instant—then turned and sped from his grave. She felt that her gaze defiled it—for, throbbing in each artery, tingling through every vein, poisoning her *heart, she felt* her whole being rise to affirm its shame—

to give the damning answer "Yes" to that poignant self-interrogation.

She was certainly late that morning, and Mrs. Deans met her with flushed face and angry eyes.

"Well, this is a nice time of day! 'Laziness is much worth when it's well guided.' It would seem to me, Myron Holder, as if you'd try to make some return for the favors I've shown you, and what I've done for you, and what I've put up with. Time and time again, I've said to myself, says I, 'Let her go—what's the good of her? What's the good of keeping a dog and doing your own barking?' But being sorry for you, I never said nothing. But now, I tell you, Myron Holder, this thing's got to quit—either you can come here in decent time, or you can stay home!" Then, in a more insulting tone of voice, she asked: "What time did ye start this morning? I'll ask your grandmother. Pretty doings these, loitering along the roads! I'd have thought you'd had enough of that. Well, don't look at me like that! You're too good to be spoken to, I suppose; it's a pity you didn't do some blushing before now! It's rather late in the day for such delikit feelings—you what? Stopped in the graveyard? I wouldn't wonder, nothing more likely; were you alone? Well 'twasn't your fault, if you were. I guess Jed Holder thinks himself lucky to be rid of the world and sich doings as yours. Poor Jed! Little did he know what shame he was leaving behind him. How your grandmother stands it and how she abides that brat, *I* can't see. One thing I've always said: 'Don't bring me no such brats as them, for I won't be concerned with no such doings!' But there, what's the use of talking? I never say nothing, but I think a lot. I guess your mother must have been a beauty from all I hear tell. Certainly you didn't get your bad blood off Jed Holder, and you must have took it some-

where. 'Like mother, like child'—well—none of such worry for me!" Then, stepping aside suddenly, and thus clearing the passage she had hitherto barred, she went on: "What are you standing looking at? Ain't you going to scrub to-day, or are you come visiting? I'm sorry if you have"—here a fine sarcasm echoed in her tone—"because I can't go and set down and entertain you, for I have my bread and butter to earn. But don't mind me—go right into the setting-room and make yourself at home."

Myron having availed herself of the first opportunity to move from under Mrs. Deans' insulting glances, had already divested herself of her sunbonnet, and was getting cloths and water for her scrubbing. Soon she escaped from Mrs. Deans' eyes, but the sound of her jibing tongue came harshly to her in every pause of her work.

The forenoon passed. After dinner the hired man brought the newspaper in and gave it to Mrs. Deans. She looked at the price of butter and eggs, and passed it to her husband.

He sat blinking by the half-open window: upon the window-sill was a bottle of sarsaparilla, a patch-work pincushion, and two or three potatoes Homer Wilson had brought to the Deans as samples—he being agent for a seedsman. Mrs. Deans brought out a big canvas-bag of carpet-balls, and, placing two chairs back to back, began winding the balls into huge skeins. She was going to dye them. Mrs. Deans worked away with her hanks, tying them carefully in separate strands, so that they would dye equally. Mr. Deans read his paper, its leaves rustling in his tremulous fingers. The sound of Myron Holder's scrubbing came raspingly through the air. The bound girl was out in the "yard" raking together dead leaves, bits of old bones, and emptied sarsaparilla bottles, *making it tidy for* the summer.

"Well, Jane!" ejaculated Henry Deans, in a tone of pleased surprise, "who d'ye think's dead?"

"Who? Old Mrs. White? Is it her? Or Mrs. Warner's sister up in Ovid? She was took terrible bad a week ago Friday. It's young Emmons! I know it! But say, isn't he owing for that last cord of wood? I never seen anything like it, the way people cheat! It's something awful! But I'll have that four dollars, though, out of Mame Emmons. If she can afford flannel at fifty cents a yard (and Ann White saw her pricing it), she can afford to pay her debts. Well, them Emmonses always was shiftless, but——"

"It ain't Emmons, though Homer Wilson says he looks most terrible bad; it's Follett!"

"You don't say!" said Mrs. Deans; "you don't say! When was he took?"

"It don't tell," answered her husband, screwing his eyes horribly as he read the obituary over again. "It don't tell—oh—yes it does! 'Caught a heavy cold a month ago and settled on his lungs. Well, he's gone, then."

"Not much loss, his kind ain't," said Mrs. Deans contemptuously.

"Wonder if he forgot me before he went?" said her husband, with a reflective enjoyment. "That was a pretty good one, wasn't it, Jane?"

"Yes; no mistake about it, Henry, you hit the nail on the head that time. I declare it does beat all how time flies. Just think! it's six years full since then——"

"Six years full—no, seven," assented Mr. Deans.

"No, six," said his wife; "it was just the year before your accident."

"So 'twas." A pause, then he said, "I think I'll have some sarsaparilly, Jane."

Mrs. Deans got a spoon from the table-drawer, drew out the gummy cork, and gave him a spoonful.

"Better have a taste yourself," he suggested.

"Don't know but I will," she said, and helped herself to a dram.

The cork was replaced; silence fell upon the pair. Henry Deans and his wife had partaken of the closest communion they knew. Mrs. Deans left her rags presently to go out to superintend the placing of some new chicken-coops, and Mr. Deans dozed off into a pleasurable reverie, evoked by the death of Dan Follett.

Around the name of Dan Follett clustered the recollections of Mr. Deans' happiest achievement—for, using Dan Follett as an unworthy instrument, he had purged Jamestown of malt and spirituous liquors and brought the village within the temperance fold.

It was thus: Dan Follett had come to "keep tavern" in the old Black Horse Inn. This was a quaint brick building that stood at the corner of the Front Street nearest the lake. It had but a narrow frontage on the Front Street, but stretched back, a long building, on the side street. From the corner of the inn hung a sign-board, depending from an iron rod. The sign was a jet black horse, *rampant*, with the legend, "Black Horse Inn." The front of the inn, rising abruptly, as it did, from the side-walk, was more quaint than inviting, but the side view was very hospitable, for all along the side street a veranda (floored with oak and roofed by the second story of the inn, which overhung it) extended, approached by broad, generous steps. It was an old, old building, with queer nooks and corners in it, quaint brass newel-posts in the stairway, odd sideboards built into the walls, and dark, hardwood floors. It was by *far the oldest* building in Jamestown, and the huge,

untidy willow tree before the door had grown from a switch thrown down by one of the soldiers, when he and his comrades departed after their long billet in Jamestown.

Jamestown was not called Jamestown in those days, but Kingsville. Times had changed with the village, and its name with them; but the Black Horse Inn remained unchanged—only the bricks had reddened the mortar between them, so that its walls were all one dark, rich red. "Many a summer's silent fingering" had wrought a green lace-work of ivy over the front and at the corners, and about the chimneys a vivid green stain showed the minute mosses that were gathering there. It was having indeed a green old age; and if the second story was beginning to sag a little between the centre-posts, it conveyed no hint of decay, or lack of safety. The droop only showed a kindly and protective attitude towards the open-armed chairs that stood on the veranda beneath.

In the little garden behind the inn, long neglected and overrun, were bushes of acrid wormwood, stray wisps of thyme, straggling roots of rosemary, and bushes of flowering currants. In the spring, from among its springing grasses came whiffs of perfume; for the English violets, planted long, long ago, had spread through and through the tangle of weeds, unkempt grass, and untrimmed bushes.

The one ambition that had lived in Jed Holder's saddened breast after he came to Jamestown was to be able to rent the Black Horse Inn. But it was only a vague, purposeless wish to possess the right of that little square garden, amid whose desolation he discerned the traces of an English hand. Like so many of Jed's dreams, this one never materialized.

To this house, *then*, came Dan Follett—displayed his

license to sell "wine, beer, malt and other spirituous liquors," set out some hospitable armchairs, erected a horse-trough before the door, and, having assumed a huge and glistening white apron, strode about, a jolly, good-natured, guardian spirit. His rubicund face was always beaming, his little eyes always blinking away tears of laughter. There was but little trade in Jamestown, but Follet managed to make ends meet, for the lake was noted for its fishing, and parties of fishermen were right glad to find a place where they could leave their horses and refresh themselves. But Dan Follett and Dan Follett's business were sore rocks of offence in the eyes of the Jamestown brethren.

At "after meeting" many plans were discussed for the discomfiture of Dan Follett, and, incidentally, the devil. Many a "class meeting" evolved an indignation caucus which dealt with the enormity of Dan Follett's calling, which was cited, with many epithets, as the cause of every evil under the sun. But of all this righteous indignation jolly Dan Follett took no heed, and was as ready to lend his stout brown horse to Mr. Deans or Mr. White when their own "odd" horse was busy as he was to hire it to the few fishermen who fancied a ride along the lake shore.

Henry Deans brooded long over this unholy thing in their midst, and finally hit upon a plan to put the devil, in the person of Dan Follett, to some discomfiture. Mr. Deans was senior deacon in the Methodist Church and, as such, took it upon himself to provide the bread and wine for sacramental purposes. One Saturday, the day before the spring communion, Mrs. Deans stood admiring her bread.

"I reckon Ann White'll open her eyes when she tastes that to-morrow," she said. "There's nothing like making *your own yeast*—good hop-yeast. I don't take no account

with salt-rising bread; may be sure enough, but hops for me every time."

These audible meditations were interrupted by a tramp's voice at the open door—a forlorn-looking object, asking for something to eat. Mrs. Deans gave him some good advice about idleness, drinking, and begging, and sent him off. Then she turned her face to the bread again, separating the loaves carefully, and wrapping two of them up in clean towels. A verse flitted through her mind about taking the children's bread and giving it to the dogs; it struck her as apposite, but her good memory, strangely enough, failed to recall anything about "a cup of cold water."

"Them tramps!" soliloquized Mrs. Deans. "A likely thing I was goin' to break into the bread for the Lord's table for the like of him!" She was just putting the bread into the tin on the pantry floor, where she kept it, when a sudden thought made her drop the bread and stand upright.

"I declare!" she said. "Henry'll never remember the wine! I forgot to tell him when he went away! What in the world will we do now? Borrow it of Ann White I won't; that's settled. Well, if it don't beat all!"

Henry Deans returned from the Saturday market about three o'clock; Mrs. Deans met him in the yard and asked him, before the horses stopped:

"Did you remember the wine?"

A slow smile crept over Henry Deans' face. He pulled up his horses deliberately.

"Did you remember the wine?" asked his wife again.

"Yes, I remembered it," he answered, still smiling slowly.

"Well," said Mrs. Deans, "why didn't you say so at first? I've just been nearly out of my mind a-worrying about it all day. *Where is it?* Hand it here and I'll take it in."

"I haven't got it yet," said her husband, descending nimbly from his perch, and then, for it was dangerous to prolong a joke too far with his wife, he went and whispered in her ear.

Mrs. Deans' face slowly became irradiate with a joyful and appreciative glow.

"Well, Henry," she said, "you're no slouch, I tell you; I always knew your head was level."

"Guess that'll sicken him, eh?" chuckled Henry Deans, and began to unbuckle his harness-straps.

For the rest of the afternoon Henry Deans and his wife went about in smiling content, chuckling irrepressibly if they chanced to meet.

They had supper at six. Night was already setting in, for the days were not at their longest yet. About half-past seven, Henry Deans got his hat, and, his wife letting him softly out of the front door, took his way to the village. He soon reached its outskirts. Down the unlighted back street he went, across the short transverse one, until the side door of the Black Horse Inn was reached. Dan Follett answered his knock in person. There was a short colloquy between the two; then Dan went his way to the darkened bar-room, and, having declined an invitation to go inside, Henry Deans waited. Presently Dan returned with a bottle and, after a generous demur, accepted the money which Mr. Deans insisted on paying, saying:

"I'm not a church-goer myself, Mr. Deans, but I wouldn't begrudge giving a little now and again;" then after repeating his invitation, bade Mr. Deans a cheery "Good-night," and closed the door.

Henry Deans went home, hardly able to restrain his mirth. From far down the road he saw a narrow slit of light, showing the front door ajar for him. He slipped *inside, to be im*mediately greeted by his wife.

"Did you get it?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I got it, and him, too," said Henry Deans; and they laughed together, as they put the bread and wine for the Lord's table in a basket.

The next day, a sweet and sunshiny Sunday, the mystery of the Lord's Supper was yet again enacted in Jamestown —the symbolic wine, clear and ruddy as heart's blood; the bread, white as an infant's brow.

Next day Henry Deans drove to the market town. On Tuesday Dan Follett was served with a summons to appear before the Court to show why he had broken the law by selling a bottle of wine to one Henry Deans in unlawful hours.

Follett's rage was intense, and could only be gauged by the height of Henry Deans' satisfaction. Of course Follett was fined. He had no defence and offered none, but was fain to relieve his mind by attempting to thrash Deans, which only resulted in his being laid under bonds to keep the peace. The whole affair had completely sickened Follett of Jamestown. He departed to new scenes, and the Black Horse Inn again was tenantless.

The exploit covered Henry Deans with glory, and he bore the honor with the conscious front of one who feels he is not overestimated. Dan Follett was dead now, and Henry Deans slept the sleep of the just in musing over his memories. And from the lonely garden of the Black Horse Inn the English sweet violets sent up their fragrance to the unperceiving night.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt and taints of blood."

NEXT day, early in the afternoon, Mrs. Deans put away her sewing, and, donning a black bonnet and a large broche shawl folded corner-wise, betook herself out of the house. She went quietly, even sneakingly—this caution was exercised with an object. Mrs. Deans did not want the bound girl to know she had gone. Such knowledge would be too conducive to a sinful peace of mind.

Mrs. Deans took her way to the village, intent on getting some dye from the store. She hesitated before the gate of the Holder cottage, then, assuming a look calculated to show the beholder that the milk of human kindness had in her case turned to cream, she entered the garden. Partly out of a desire to show old Mrs. Holder that this was really a neighborly visit, and partly to come upon her unawares if possible and see what she was doing, and also to have an opportunity of seeing the child without asking to see it, Mrs. Deans followed the little footpath round to the back door. It was open. The small kitchen was scrupulously clean; some washtubs stood in one corner full of soapy water, awaiting the return of Myron to empty them. Mrs. Holder had deferred her washing, evidently. A line hung diagonally across one corner of the room, and upon it a row of little ill-shaped garments hung drying, fluttered by the slight breeze from the open door. The rest of the scanty washing Mrs. Deans could see in the garden; old Mrs. Holder never hung a garment of the child's *outside.*

Mrs. Deans scrutinized all these things, standing at the open door, but not knowing where Mrs. Holder might be; and fearful lest the sharp-eyed old Englishwoman had already seen her spying out the land, she felt impelled to knock. This she did, and in a moment Mrs. Holder came from the front room. Seeing Mrs. Deans, she greeted her with the nearest approach to warmth she was capable of displaying, and placed a wooden rocking-chair for her, sitting down herself in a narrow high-backed wooden chair, bolt upright and with her arms folded. Presently she let fall her hands into her lap, twisting them nervously, one within the other; they were bleached an unhealthy pallor, and their palms and fingers tips crinkled like crape, from her washing.

"And how are you, Mrs. Deans?" she asked. Her voice held a strong English accent.

"Oh, well; for which I ought to be thankful," returned Mrs. Deans. "Considering them as is took that is unprepared, *we* ought to be grateful that *we're* spared, for it would seem as if them that *is* ready would go the first. Dan Follett died last Thursday. How do you find yourself, Mrs. Holder?"

"Not well—not at all well," returned the old woman, her voice querulous. "I was took cruel queer last night, a-gasping after breath as wouldn't come. I'm nigh tired enough o' living, if I could die mind-easy, but I can't."

"Yes," said Mrs. Deans, pursing her lips and shaking her head, "we all have our troubles; but you have had a terrible affliction, and, as I have often said to Henry, 'Old Mrs. Holder does take it terrible hard.'"

"It do be hard," said Mrs. Holder. Then came a pause.

Mrs. Deans was in certain ways clever; she knew the futility of attempting to force Mrs. Holder's confidence, therefore she contented herself with a lugubrious shake

of her head, a sympathetic expression of eye, and murmured:

"Yes—it's terrible hard!"

"Yes," began Mrs. Holder, almost reflectively, "to think as it should come to me, being afraid o' being buried, due to not knowing who's going to lay along o' me. It do seem main hard"—here the speaker's tones grew hard and her beady eyes venomous—"but I'll find a way somehow. Myron Kind's daughter and her bastard brat don't never lay alongside o' my son and me."

Light now dawned upon Mrs. Deans. She fully appreciated Mrs. Holder's attitude in the matter; she rose to the occasion.

"It's the lot up in the cemetery that's worrying you," she said. "Well, so 'twould me, to think a young one sich as that was going to be next hand, touching me in my grave!"

At that moment there came a sound from the adjoining bedroom, the door was ajar, a chubby hand reached through the opening, and pulled the door wide, and the next instant, Myron's baby, roused from his sleep by the sound of their voices, came out, and, walking totteringly across the floor, took hold of his grandmother's dress, and stood eying Mrs. Deans with the frank impertinence of babyhood.

His yellow hair was tossed and tangled; his blue eyes, a little heavy yet from sleep, were placid and happy; his face was round and dimpled, one cheek flushed a deep rose from the pressure of the pillow. He looked indeed perfect as any cherubic picture. However such children as he may develop—undoubtedly the blond, rosy, dimpled type is the ideal baby.

There was something grotesque in these two women: their souls grimed with the dust of their own sins, their

hearts hardened beneath a crust of their own self-seeking lusts, their bodies calloused by the world, defiled by their own passions, fearing contamination, living or dead, from too near vicinity to that child.

"Run away, My," said his grandmother, giving him a little push. The baby stood still a moment. A gray cat peeped in at the door, and then withdrew its head; with a gurgle of laughter, the child trotted after it.

Mrs. Deans had been eying him steadily since his appearance.

"Now, *who* does that young one look like?" said she with emphasis, as if to force an answer by her earnestness.

"Nobody," said Mrs. Holder. "He do be 'witched, I think. I never see a child like him afore. You could always see a likeness in some trick or other, but that young one has no tricks with him; them's his ways, such as you've seen: eat—smile—sleep."

"Well, it beats all," said Mrs. Deans, feeling exasperated.

A trill of inarticulate laughter interrupted them, and the baby appeared at the door, the gray cat in his arms, wriggling to free itself. It did. Putting its hind legs against the baby's breast, it sprang out of his arms; the recoil sent the boy down, but he picked himself up and again began the pursuit.

"Now, Mrs. Holder, you was telling me about the cemetery lot," said Mrs. Deans.

"Yes;" returned her hostess. "It's this way: there's four graves in the lot, and only one took up. I can't abear to think on it; to think whether I will or no that I have to lie wi' such a lot an' rise wi' 'em at the day."

"Well," said Mrs. Deans, in a meditative voice, "well" —a long pause, then she added: "Now, if 'twasn't for offending you, Mrs. Holder, I think I can see my way."

"I'll be right glad if you do," said Mrs. Holder, eagerly; "it's vexing me sore."

"Well," began Mrs. Deans, "it's this way. I've done a lot of business, one way and another, and I'm used to seeing through things, and this is what I would suggest, Mrs. Holder—not that I want to make or meddle with other folks' business, but being always willing to do what I can to help along, and what I would suggest is this: Get Muir to call here and fix it with him, so as he'll do whatever's necessary when the time comes; and you give him half the lot for it, so, if anything happens, why everything'll be done up proper; and then he'll stake off half the lot and you needn't be scared; he'll not let it out of his hands. That's what I would suggest, Mrs. Holder, not that I pretend to be anything more than common—but I've done a heap of business in my time."

"It do seem fair wonderful, Mrs. Deans," said Mrs. Holder, her face lighting with an ugly expression of gratified malice; "it do be fair wonderful, the mind you have; but how'll I get word to Muir? I don't want Myron to know, of course, and I *won't* go down street with My flaunting the family shame—and there I be fair stuck."

"I'm passing Muir's as I go to the store," said Mrs. Deans, rising. "Oh, no thanks, please; don't thank me. We must all do what we can to help other folks along, you know, in this world, and I don't take it no trouble to do my share."

"Well, I take it rare kindly," returned the old woman.

"Oh," said her guest, pausing, "I meant specially to ask you about Myron; she was terrible late yesterday morning. I spoke to her about it, and she spunked up dreadful; got 's red's fire and never said a word. I thought it my duty to tell you, Mrs. Holder, being anxious for her good and knowing you couldn't look after her, when she was out of your sight."

"She was late yesterday morning in starting," said Mrs. Holder, "but I be fair ashamed she should show herself like that to you, after your goodness to her, and bearing with her, as you have done. Oh, Myron has her mother's ways—sulky she is, and close-mouthed." (Alas! was this all the memory left of Myron Kind's gentleness and sweet patience!) "You can see what I have to put up with day in and day out. Come here, My!" This to the child, as she saw him going along the path.

"Yes, you have your own times, I'll warrant," said Mrs. Deans. "What did you call the young one?"

"My," replied Mrs. Holder. "That's what she always calls it, and I'm bound it's most fitting, being near her own name. I fair hate that name, Mrs. Deans. Myron's mother took my son away from me and she brought me shame; it's fit and well to call the brat that too."

"Yes, indeed, you're right there," agreed Mrs. Deans, at once relieved and disappointed; relieved that her Gamaliel was left in undisturbed possession of his name, disappointed that Myron Holder had not given some more *definite* name to her child—Homer, for instance.

Mrs. Deans took her way down street, filled with righteous self-congratulation. The scheme of debarring Myron Holder from ever lying beside her father seemed to her most admirable. Doubtless, from a strictly legal point of view, there might have been difficulties in the way, but who was going to tell Myron that? Mrs. Deans smiled to think of Myron's surprise when she found out. Myron Holder had never done Mrs. Deans any injury, but the latter cherished against her that inexplicable hatred, that alien from rhyme or reason, sometimes fearfully fostered in the human heart. This feeling, mature and enfranchised, made the streets of Paris red with blood; has nerved the hand that hurled a bomb; has steadied the

aim of the assassin and, developed by heredity and indulged by training and opportunity, has made the Thugs a people. To inflict what others endure with pain is their life.

Half-way down the street Mrs. Deans paused before a door overshadowed by a green painted veranda, supported by spindling posts; upon each side of the door was a window. In one was displayed a mortuary wreath, made of white stucco flowers and a star formed of six nickel-plated coffin-plates, tastefully disposed against a black background, the same being the beaver covering stripped from one of Mr. Muir's defunct tall hats. In the other window was placed a small coffin. This cheerful display was intended to indicate that the Jamestown undertaker was to be found within.

As Mrs. Deans entered a bell hung over the top of the door rang, and as its note died away in a harsh tinkle steps began to come from the rear of the shop—slow, solemn footsteps, the echo of one dying away before the other succeeded it, which gave a sepulchral effect to the tread of Mr. Muir. They were indeed a fitting herald of the little undertaker's appearance, which distinctly suggested his vocation.

He was short and broad, without being in the least stout. He had a sandy colored beard, so shaggy as to be almost woolly, and which he wore parted in the middle and brushed on either side into the semblance of a gigantic Dundreary. He wore habitually a broadcloth suit, and of these he had always three, one in the last stages of dilapidation that he wore when doing his "chores" in the morning, attending to his two spare-ribbed black horses, oiling the wheels of the hearse, etc.; another he wore when he "kept shop," and when attending to the private offices of his profession; the third was the holiest, and

reserved for his public functions at the funerals. The suit always consisted of a frock coat, which fell below his knees and hung around him in folds; a waistcoat buttoned up to the neck, and a pair of trousers that were always too short, but which made up in width for that deficiency. An odd little bird of ill-omen he was. His face was settled into an expression of unalleviated gloom; his features had assumed an attitude of mournful resignation. From this funereal countenance his eyes shone forth strangely—little bright eyes, keen and acquisitive.

He advanced, rubbing his hands slowly together. "Mrs. Deans," he said, and bowed.

This bow was an acquirement much thought of in Jamestown. What more palliating to bereaved feelings than to behold Mr. Muir, in all the black glory of grief, ushering in the funeral guests with a succession of these bows! He had a clever knack of including the "remains" in each of these genuflections, which were always performed at the door of the room where the dead lay. His appearance upon these official occasions was little less than sublime; the way in which he removed his tall hat from his head was in itself a poem—hardly ostentatious, yet most impressive—exalting the act to a ceremonial and dignifying the performance unspeakably.

Mrs. Deans never cared much for Mr. Muir. The little man's eye held a certain proprietary look that chilled one's blood; it was as though he viewed one in the light of prospective "remains"—as who should say, "Go your way in your own fashion *now;* some day you will go *my* way in *my* fashion." A tape-line always showed itself from one of his pockets, and this in itself brought as grewsome a suggestion as any one cared to contemplate.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Muir?" said Mrs. Deans. "How d'ye do? How's the world treating you these days?"

"Oh, well, very well," replied Mr. Muir solemnly, still rubbing his hands together; then he nodded towards the rear of the shop: "Will you go in?" he asked. This was Mr. Muir's way of inviting customers to inspect the coffins.

"No, not to-day," said Mrs. Deans hastily. "I haven't called about any work for you, Mr. Muir, but on business."

Mr. Muir looked puzzled, the terms evidently bearing some relation to each other in his estimation.

"It's for old Mrs. Holder," went on Mrs. Deans.

"If it's to do any burying for her, I won't do it unless the council guarantees it," interrupted Mr. Muir, with decision. "Here I have waited and waited for Jed's money, and only got the last of it last week—got it by fifty centses. It ain't satisfying, getting a bill in fifty-cent pieces; it ain't business. They get the coffin in a lump; they ought to pay in a lump. No, I can't do it, Mrs. Deans, not meaning to disoblige you, though; and I hope you won't hold it against me and keep back the favor of your business. Of course doing for you and doing for such as Holders is two stories. Now, for you or your husband, something more after the style of General——"

Mrs. Deans broke in hastily. Once upon a time, Mr. Muir had travelled seven hundred miles to see the funeral of a great general. That funeral was to Mr. Muir what a visit to Rome is to an artist; and his description of it was a story to outlast the passing of the pageant it pictured. All Jamestown knew the story, and Mrs. Deans felt that prompt action alone could save her.

"It don't concern burying people at all, Mr. Muir, but burying ground." Mrs. Deans gurgled over her own joke. "And I'll just tell you about it, if you'll wait a minute. You see," looking confidential, "it's like this: Mrs.

Holder takes it terrible hard about Myron's goings-on, and when she dies she can't bear to think her and her young one is going to be put right a-touching her, as you may say, which ain't to be wondered at when one considers the importance of the thing." Mrs. Deans paused for breath and to give this time to have due effect upon Mr. Muir, who was once known to complain because people spent more on marrying than on burying.

Mr. Muir nodded his approval, and Mrs. Deans continued:

"That being the case, Mr. Muir, as I said, it ain't to be wondered at that Mrs. Holder is uneasy and wants to fix it so she 'n' her son'll be undisturbed. So, having asked me about the matter, I siggested to her that you could fix it, if any one could; and so she wants you to call up to see her, because she can't leave My, and she won't bring him out."

"Who's My?" asked Mr. Muir.

"Why, that's the young one! Didn't you know? That's more of Myron Holder's slyness. But pshaw! What's the use of talking? Them kind's all alike. But fancy naming it after herself! Well, as I said, old Mrs. Holder, she wanted you should come up to see her and make a trade. Now, I hope you'll go, Mr. Muir, being as I specially siggested t' her that you could help her out."

"I'll go, Mrs. Deans; I'll go," said Mr. Muir. "Think I'll just slip up by White's and see the lot first; nigh-hand to Warner's, ain't it?"

"Yes, nigh close to old man Warner's, which was filled when Ann Eliza was buried. Mr. White did say that Ann Eliza overlapped his lot. But there! it doesn't do to say them things; it ain't me to spread talk. She had a queer look, though, Ann Eliza did when she was laid out, hadn't she, Mr. Muir?" Here Mrs. Deans nodded with much sinister *meaning at* Mr. Muir.

"Yes, a very wretched-looking body she made. I like to see a cheerful-looking corpse; something more after the style of Jed Holder. Now, when he was ready, he was a real credit to me, though his pay was onsatisfactory—very onsatisfactory."

"Yes, Jed did smooth out most wonderful," agreed Mrs. Deans. "Then you'll go up to Mrs. Holder's? Better go soon, Mr. Muir; old Warner'll be after more lots some of these days."

"Yes, without a doubt, Mrs. Deans," said Mr. Muir. Mrs. Deans pulled the door open, again the harsh bell rang, and she heard its dying tinkle through Mr. Muir's farewells, for he came outside the door with her, and after she betook herself down the street, he still lingered, gloating critically over the arrangement of the coffin-plates in his window.

Mrs. Deans proceeded down the street, and soon reached the store. As she paused at the store door, she looked back and saw the undertaker just entering his shop.

"He'll never handle any job for me," Mrs. Deans said, recalling the rudeness of his interruption during their conversation. "I'll get Foster from Ovid for Henry."

She entered the store, purchased her dyestuffs quickly, and then, all business cares off her mind, set her face steadfastly to go to Mrs. Wilson's.

Now, Mrs. Deans was extremely eager to find out if Mrs. Wilson's anxiety about the naming of Myron Holder's child sprang from any knowledge or suspicion of the boy's parentage. As she trod heavily along the sandy footpath to the Wilson farm, she turned the matter over in her mind and considered the best means of getting at the truth, or at least all Mrs. Wilson knew of it. Gossip is something more, perhaps, than a vulgar propensity—*there is art in it*, as in everything else. There are several

ways of inducing others to talk freely of their affairs. Mrs. Deans thoroughly appreciated the distinctions between the methods. One way which Mrs. Deans had found very effective in some cases is to assume high ground; treat the discussion with the careless condescension of one to whom it is an old story; acknowledge every tid-bit of information with a nod signifying thorough acquaintance with the whole matter; the victim, oftentimes irritated by your show of superior knowledge, goes on supplying detail after detail, in the hope of startling you out of your apathy. This plan has however, as Mrs. Deans knew, been known to miss fire, and when it fails, it fails completely. She hesitated to try it with Mrs. Wilson.

Another very seductive plan is to assume an air of great meekness and draw your subject out by seeming to believe she knows all about the mooted question—whilst lowly you know nothing. Few women can resist this—the desire to flaunt the knowledge imputed to them is too strong to be denied.

Mrs. Deans slowly entered the Wilson gate. The path from the road led up to the house between two rows of large stones, placed at regular intervals from each other, upon the grass at the side of the path. These stones were whitewashed every now and then by Mrs. Wilson, and were considered to give quite an "air" to the place. The spring house-cleaning being just over, they shone dazzlingly white from a fresh coat; their ranks were broken half-way up to the house by two small "rockeries," over which grew "Live Forever," "Old Man," "Winter Verbena," and "Lemon Balm;" they were each crowned by a geranium, the one a sweet-scented one, the other a single scarlet. Close to the house grew two plum trees, one on each side of the path. From the branches of one was suspended a *hanging-basket* made out of half of a cocoa-

nut-shell, in which grew "Creeping Charlie," whilst the other tree was adorned by a tin pan filled with the luxuriantly-growing jointed stems of the "Wandering Jew." On each side of the steps—for Mrs. Wilson was fond of uniformity—stood a brown shilling crock, one almost hidden beneath a green mat of a trailing vine called "Jacob's Ladder," the other holding an upright and sturdy "Jerusalem Cherry Tree" (known to unimaginative botanists as Solanum), around whose roots were appearing the tiny rosettes of portulaca seedlings.

Mrs. Deans noted these things not altogether approvingly, Marian Wilson being in her estimation somewhat perilously given up to vanities.

Her knock brought a speedy answer in the person of Mrs. Wilson. "Well, Jane," she ejaculated, "come right in. I was jest expectin' you some of these days; come right into the setting room and lay off your things, and we'll visit together for a spell."

"Oh, I ain't come to stop," said Mrs. Deans, suffering herself to be led into the sitting-room. "I ain't come to stop, only as I was just at the store for dye, I thought I'd come on and see you."

"You done right," said Mrs. Wilson; "you done right there, and I'm real glad you've come. Got your rags all sewed?"

"Yes, forty-two pounds," replied Mrs. Deans, who all this time had been mechanically untying her bonnet-strings and affecting to be oblivious of the actions of Mrs. Wilson, who was unpinning her shawl. Presently, the bonnet-strings being unloosened, Mrs. Wilson dexterously switched away bonnet and shawl, and said triumphantly:

"Now, Jane, come and set down." Then, and not till then, Mrs. Deans awoke with a start to the fact that her *outdoor garb had* been removed.

"Why, Marian, I declare," she said, "you do beat all!"

Having suffered herself to be led to and installed in a rocking-chair, Mrs. Deans settled herself comfortably for a talk.

"What colors are you going to dye, Jane?" asked Mrs. Wilson.

"Well," said Mrs. Deans, checking off the list on her fingers, "I've got hickory bark for yellow, and walnut shucks that I saved last fall for brown, and barberry stems to mix with bluing for green; and I've bought red and magenta and blue, and I was thinking that, being as I didn't want much color, that would be enough."

"Yes," said Mrs. Wilson, "I never care for a carpet that is just a mess of colored rags. I like a good deal of yellow, though. I seen one in the market the other day; a woman from Ovid had it for sale, and it was real neat-looking. It had a brier twist of yellow and black in the middle of the pattern, and a stripe of red at each side; then there was a wide piece of purple and a narrow stripe of green; the filling up was mixed, with a lot of blue in it, and she had it wove with red warp."

"I didn't get any purple," said Mrs. Deans, "but I might get it——"

"Say, wouldn't red and blue mix for purple?" asked Mrs. Wilson.

"Why, I don't know but they would! Where did she have hers wove?"

"Up to Skinner's at the Pinewoods," said Mrs. Wilson. "They *do* say the Skinnerses keeps back the rags and helps themselves to the warp; but the way I do is to weigh the warp and the rags, and then when I get the carpet back I weigh that."

"A very good way, too," agreed Mrs. Deans. "I'd like to see the carpet-weaver that would cheat me!"

"Have to get up early in the morning, eh, Jane?" said Mrs. Wilson, approvingly.

"Yes, earlier than before night," chuckled Mrs. Deans. "Suppose you heard Dan Follett was gone?"

"Yes, Homer seen the funeral; 'twas a most terrible big one, and nothing would do Homer but he must follow on with it to the cemetery. It do seem hard to think how one's son'll go on doing sich things. The idea!" Mrs. Wilson concluded between a sniff and a snort.

"Yes," said Mrs. Deans, sympathetically. "Well, there's one good thing, no one would hold you responsible for Homer's doings now. I tell you when men gets his age, they're bound to go their own ways." Then abruptly, "I was at Mrs. Holder's to-day." Here Mrs. Deans looked full at Mrs. Wilson.

"You was?" said her hostess. "You was? Who did you see?"

"I seen old Mrs. Holder and the young one; it's named——"

"What?" asked Mrs. Wilson, breathlessly.

"Well, you'd never guess," said Mrs. Deans, maliciously prolonging her hostess' agony. "You'd never guess. I'm sure I never suspicioned she'd call it that. I suppose it's fitting, most fitting, I should say—but there! What's the odds what it's called? I wouldn't let it worry me, no matter what she called it."

"What *is* its name, Jane?" asked Mrs. Wilson, with such directness that Mrs. Deans could not disregard it.

"My," answered she, "My—short for Myron."

"Well, Jane," gasped Mrs. Wilson, in relief, and affecting that her exclamation was one of surprise; "well, it beats all!"

Mrs. Deans felt satisfied on one point: Mrs. Wilson had *certainly had grave* fears in regard to the naming of the

child—too grave to be causeless, Mrs. Deans assured herself. Well, Mrs. Deans had never thought much of Homer Wilson—he was altogether too conceited, and he never spoke in revival meeting any more than that once; and he was too sure of himself, and too independent. So it was Homer Wilson, then! Why hadn't he married her? Why hadn't Myron told? Now, if she—Mrs. Deans—could only expose the two of them, how meritorious that would be! A hazy plan to attack Homer on the question flitted through her brain; to ask him suddenly, when he was unprepared, point-blank—would that startle him into a confession or a betrayal of the truth in spite of himself?

Mrs. Deans and Mrs. Wilson talked the afternoon away, peaceably and amicably, and in the twilight Mrs. Deans went home. She met Myron half way to the village and stopped her.

"I been in to see your grandmother to-day," she said. "I wonder at you, Myron Holder, that you ain't ashamed to show your face; she's failing fast, your grandmother is, and no wonder! Well, I wouldn't have your conscience for something. Poor old woman, slaving herself to death over a young one like that. But you'll be found out yet, Myron Holder; and when you do, don't look to me, thinking I'll back you up, for I won't; the time for that's past, unless you want to take your last chance and own up the whole of it now." Mrs. Deans paused—her very attitude an interrogation.

"Good-night, Mrs. Deans," said Myron, in her soft English voice, and passed on with down-bent head.

Mrs. Deans stood for quite a minute amazed, looking after the quiet form going wearily into the dusk of the gathering night—to be left thus was a trifle too much. "I'll take it out of her for that!" said Mrs. Deans, flushing with wrath. "I'll let her know what's what, or my

name ain't Deans. The idea! She'll walk off and leave me standing talking to her, will she? Well,——"

Mrs. Deans resumed her irate way. Myron Holder held on her path to the village. She was numb alike in mind and body; the accumulated weariness of days of toil and nights of painful thought pressed upon her; it was marvellous how she endured the fatigues of her life without breaking down physically. "As thy days so shall thy strength be!" has hidden a germ of bane as well as blessing. Does it not often seem as if sorrow imbued life with its own bitter tenacity? Was ever such a fearful doom pictured as that of the Eternal Wanderer "mocked with the curse of immortality"?

So Myron Holder went home in the twilight, and Mrs. Deans went home revolving fresh schemes for her humiliation, inventing new burdens for her overtaxed shoulders. "God," they say, "builds the nest of the blind bird." Is it man who lines it with thorns?

CHAPTER IX.

"A sleepy land, where under the same wheel,
The same old rut would deepen year by year."

"A life of nothings—nothing worth
From that first nothing ere his birth
To that last nothing under earth."

THE Jamestown people, in making a pariah of Myron Holder, were not urged to the step by any imperative feeling of hurt honor or pained surprise.

Such faults as hers were not uncommon there; but never before had the odium rested upon one only. Besides, *there had always* been some "goings on" and some "talk"

indicative of the affair. In Myron Holder's case, the Jamestown people had been caught napping. In such cases a marriage and reinstatement into public favor was the usual sequel, arrived at after much exhilarating and spicy gossip, much enjoyable speculation, much mediation upon the part of the matrons, and much congratulation that all had ended so well.

For another thing, Myron Holder was an outsider, and there was no danger that a word spoken against her would provoke any one else to anger. The Jamestown people were all the descendants of some half-dozen families, the original settlers of the country. They had stagnated year after year, generation after generation marrying and intermarrying. The Jamestown people of Myron Holder's day bore a strange resemblance to one another. The descendants of the same families, subjected to the same mental influences, the same conditions of life, the same climate, the same religion—it was not to be wondered at that every prominent or individualized feature of mind and body had been obliterated and averaged down to a commonplace uniformity.

Distinct physical types were rare here, very dark or very fair people being seldom seen. The features were coarse and ill-defined, the nostrils merging into the cheeks, the chins into the necks, the pale lips into the dull-colored faces, with no clear line of demarcation, no pure curve to define form.

Certain peculiarities appertained to certain families, however. When one of the few—very few—Jamestown men who had gone forth to the outside world returned, he had not much difficulty in approximating at least the parentage of the children he encountered in the streets; for one had the Deans nose, a pinched-in, miserly, censorious feature, given to the smelling out of scandal; another

had the Warner walk, a gait that in a horse would be termed racking; a third might have the Wilson scowl, a peculiar expression that seemed to emanate from sulkiness; a fourth was evidently a scion of the Disney stock, for he gazed out of the Disney eyes, always rheumy and without lashes.

There appeared in Jamestown families every now and then an imbecile, presenting, as in a terrible composite picture, the mental and moral weaknesses of his related ancestors.

Nearly every family counted, in some of its branches, one or more of these unfortunates.

Jamestown's attitude towards these maimed souls was characteristically utilitarian; they were fed and clothed until they arrived at an age when, if they were harmless, they became useful, or if they were violent, their mania became dangerous. In the former case they were given a full quota of work, and kept out of sight so far as possible, toiling early and late, horrible brownies, working unseen, unpaid, unthanked, unpitied. If they were violent, they were sent as paupers to the governmental institutions and forgotten.

Jamestown was stirred by no noble ambition, thrilled by no eager hope, excited by no generous impulse, moved by no patriotic enthusiasm, undisturbed by visions, unmoved by wars,—craved neither glory nor fame—

> "Though fame is smoke,
> Its fumes are frankincense to human thought."

And how poor a potsherd the human temple is, when savored with no incense of endeavor! Better the bitter breath of failure than the dank vapor of stagnating faculties. The haloes of defeated effort are sweeter than the *lotus of inaction.*

Jamestown's religion? If the God of whom preachers prate so familiarly really exists, with what awful scorn must *He* behold such worship! As monkeys, mowing and moping, might mock a pageant, so did these people simulate religion. Old Eliza—Mrs. Wilson's mad cousin—worshipped better when she dabbled her hands in the wayside horse-trough, rejoicing in its coolness; when she smoothed with tender fingers the torn fur of a half-shot rabbit; when she replaced the unfledged birds in the nest from which they had fallen—nay, even when she sped across the sunlit fields, her sodden face irradiate with an inarticulate feeling of the warmth and freedom of the air.

Nature spread about and before these people all her beauties, unfolded to their gaze all the enchantment of her seasons, but in vain; their eyes were darkened, their hearts hardened; the magical mystery of Spring left them ineloquent; Summer came and lingered, and went reluctantly; Autumn browned, and Winter fulfilled its bitterness, and they were unmoved save by the effect upon the crops.

The site of Jamestown and the country surrounding it was historic ground. Here men had fought and bled and died. The fathers and mothers of the present generation told how, when children, they had been hurried off to the woods, to hide there whilst the soldiers ransacked the deserted houses, eating and appropriating all they fancied, and spitefully spilling milk, wantonly cutting holes in the cheeses, and throwing the frying-pans and flatirons down the wells for mischief. These leisurely warriors were not, however, the ones whose blood had darkened the soil in so many adjacent spots. The Jamestown people had no personal reminiscences or knowledge of these sterner fighters, but evidences of their existence and warfare were plentiful.

Year by year, the neighboring farmers, in tilling their

land, found bullets, broken bayonets, portions of old-fashioned guns, military buttons, and Indian arrow heads of flint. These latter relics were often defaced, pointless, and chipped, but sometimes they had preserved in perfection their venomous pointed form, sharp to sting to the death when hurled through the air from a hostile bow. Year after year, these tokens of conflict were found in the fresh furrows; the supply seemed inexhaustible. It was as though the earth was determined to cast forth from her bosom those deadly fragments whose mission had been to maim and slay her children. Yet Mother Earth is but a cruel stepdame to some of us, less kindly than the bullet, more cruel than the flint arrowhead.

The people in Jamestown thought little enough of these relics, though in springtime they were to be found in the pockets of every ploughman; but little Bing White had a collection of some hundreds of them. They had a strange fascination for the little elfish boy. People said he had just escaped being an idiot: that was far from the truth.

A keen and acute intelligence shone from his eyes, but perverted by morbid and horrible cravings. He was of a Newtonian and speculative turn of mind also, and was perpetually pondering upon problems of weighty import, suggested to him by the simplest manifestations of every-day life: Why dogs barked at bakers? Why blacksmith-shops were never new? Why buttered bread falls butter-side down? were questions that he strove with. The wonder of the arrowheads appearing year after year in the furrows was to him a source of never-ceasing thought. How was it they came to the surface? What strange grinding went on below the grain and the grass, to produce that flinty grist each springtime? He brooded much over the matter, turning his many specimens over and over with lingering, *affectionate* touches.

Bing kept his treasures in the space between the lath and plaster of the second story and the roof of his father's house. There was no room for garrets there—but there was a space in which Bing's diminutive figure could stand erect. The ingress to this long, low, dark chamber was through a tiny trap-door, in the ceiling of one of the back rooms. Through this, he would wriggle swiftly, replace the trap-door (in reality only a broad board), speed like a cat from joist to joist across the whole length of the house to where, through the round panes of the little gable window, the light fell full upon his collection, laid out in rows upon boards placed across the joists.

Each arrowhead of the lot had an individuality for this boy; every misshapen fragment a story. Indeed he dwelt longer over the pointless and defaced specimens than over the others, for more fascinating than any perfection of curve or point was the speculation as to *where* the fragments of the broken ones rested. Could it be possible that the long tapering point of the arrowhead he held in his hand had pierced some red-clad bosom, some dusky naked breast brought low, some helmeted head, some feather-decked crown, and won a costly coffin for itself to be buried in? Those notches on the side of the heavy white flint one, were they the scars of a conflict between the arrow and armor?

Bing White was not an imbecile, but he had strange fancies in that dusky treasure chamber of his, gloating over his arrowheads, whispering to himself of bloody deeds wrought and cruel blows dealt by these flints he held in his palms.

There was one long, narrow arrowhead, sharp and keen-edged, that he had a great affection for. He used to take it up lovingly and, baring his forearm, draw it lightly—lightly—close to the skin, his eyes dilating, his

nostrils quivering; now and then, his hand faltering, he let it touch the flesh, and the keen edge swiftly brought blood.

At the pain he would drop the flint, but at the crimson drops which showed its bite he would gaze hungrily, delightedly, tracing them out in tiny red lines upon the white flesh of his meagre arm until the last vestige had disappeared; and then he would start and tremble, his fingers twitching strangely, his eyes peering here and there through the dusky perspective of his refuge, as if hoping to see some blur of the crimson fluid he loved. Then he would kiss the vicious arrowhead, and fondle it, until, hearing his mother's call, he would lay it down gently and flee across the joists, surefooted and nimble, to the trap-door.

By the time he descended his face would have lost the wild irradiation of his hidden joy; but his eyes followed any small creature, the cats, the chickens, the self-satisfied ducks. He whispered to himself in his dreams of a day when he would not deny his desire for blood.

A strange impish development of character was his: dangerous by reason of the stubbornness of his race, and strangely blended and nurtured with and by a love of vivid and bright color. This latter characteristic was instilled into the White blood, when one of the far-back Whites, who had been to the war, returned, bringing with him a gypsy camp-follower as his wife, making her the great-grandmother of this boy, who cherished the flint arrowheads for the pain they could inflict, and who dreamt long dreams, the atmosphere of which was crimsoned with blood and vocal with cries of pain.

This unhealthy mental state found for itself plenty of sustenance, as all vile plants and animals do, sucking the virus of its unhealthy existence from every phase of

nature, every homely incident in village life. He let no chance escape him to enjoy his ghoulish pleasure; the killing of the poultry twice a week for market was a festival he never missed.

At the village shambles he was a frequent guest; at a pig-sticking he was always on hand, interested, helpful; no scientist in a clinic ever watched with greater enthusiasm the performance of a new experiment than did Bing White the bleeding of a horse—of all these events he had accurate information. If all these failed him, he sped far down the margin of the lake, to where the gillnets were, and appeased his craving by watching the slow, turgid drops that fell when they prepared the fish.

In autumn, when the paths through the ample woods were overhung with crimson canopies of leaves, which the winds brought down like blots of blood to be trodden under foot; when the brambles clung red about the fences or trailed scarlet along the ground; when the bitter-sweet hung in vermilion clusters from its bare stems, and the Virginian creeper clothed the cedars in a fiery mantle—at this time Bing White's eyes were ever gleaming with unholy happiness, only no one ever noticed it.

It is from such material as this boy that those morbid murderers are evolved who do murder for murder's sake. Just where in his ante-natal history the love of color flamed into a love of blood, who shall say? But it burned within him, a consuming fire; if quenched, to be quenched only by the annihilation of the being that embodied it. If left to burn? . . .

He had much knowledge of and liking for animals, but it was the liking of the instinctive vivisector. Inexplicable cases of maimed and killed animals attested his devotion to the gratification of his curiosity. The sudden

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elongation and apparent telescoping of a cat's paw was a subject that for hours had kept him sleepless.

He had solved the riddle first by putting it down to some trick of his eyesight, but the keenness of his vision was proverbial in Jamestown, and that did not long content him. Then he took a tape-line and measured a paw, and waited for the stretching process. It came. The huge Maltese stretched out his forepaws in languorous indolence. Bing promptly caught one and began to measure; the cat instantly contracted its muscles. Bing strove to hold the paw out by force, with the result that the cat (which was of the giant order, and no degenerate descendant of its wild progenitors) fixed its teeth through the fleshy part of his thumb, from which it was with difficulty disengaged. The wound inflamed and festered, but the symptoms disappeared in a week or two. Shortly after the cat died in a fit.

The dilation and contraction of the eyes of animals was a source of continual speculation to Bing; a matter he strove in horrid ways to elucidate. There was something hideously repulsive in this boy's secret cruelties, horrible to relate, sickening to contemplate. But the creatures he tormented, maimed, killed, knew neither anticipation nor remembrance; the "corporeal pang" was all.

There was a strange and horrible parallel between his nature and the nature of the women who tortured so ceaselessly the woman whom fate had made their victim; a little difference in method, a little divergence of application, a slight change from the physical to the mental world—that was all save a dreadful difference in the victim; but the instinct of cruelty was the same.

There is an organized society in one of our great cities for putting dumb animals out of pain—out of existence. It had been well for Myron Holder had she been one of *those creatures* to which a merciful death is vouchsafed. The

lilied purity of her womanhood might be gone, but we do not rend the petals of even spent flowers. It is hard to tread upon even a crushed blossom, and painful to see a broken lily flung to smother in a sewer.

CHAPTER X.

"Desolation is a delicate thing.
It walks not on the earth, it floats not on the air,
But treads with killing footsteps, and fans with silent wing,
The tender hopes which in their hearts the best and gentlest bear;
Who, soothed to false repose by the fanning plumes above,
And the music-stirring motion of its soft and busy feet,
Dream visions of aerial joy, and call the monster Love,
And wake, and find the shadow Pain. . . ."

"THE smoke is falling, the ducks and geese are flying about, the maple leaves are turned underside up, the cocks are crowing, the cat is eating grass, the gulls have left the lake and fly over the land, the flies sting, and the cement on the cellar floor is damp, so I think it's going to rain; and if it does, I ain't a-going to begin to color my rags," said Mrs. Deans, standing arms akimbo on the doorstep.

"Yes," said her husband, "it's a deal like rain; the moon had a shroud on it last night, and the frogs croaked terrible, and my rheumatics has just been ramping."

"Yes," went on Mrs. Deans, "my corns has ached intolerable, and the cows have been lowing since daybreak; there's no doubt but what it's going to rain. I wonder if Myron Holder is a-coming, or if she ain't!"

"Oh, she'll be here in time for breakfast!" said Mr. Deans, with would-be sarcasm. "How you can abide that

girl and Liz I don't know, Jane; no mortal good's fur's I see. That Liz eats her head off every day she rises, and as for Myron Holder, she picks and pecks and turns up her nose as if the eatin' wasn't good enough for her; it beats me what's the good of 'em."

"Well," said his wife, sharply, "there ain't no great call, fur's I see, for you to see whether they're any good or not, an' no need for you to worry over the victuals, for that I'll make shift to attend to. I suppose you'd like me to slave myself to death, and git along without 'em? Well, if that's what's on your mind, just relieve your feelings of it right away—for be a slave to no man I won't, and that settles that!" with which Mrs. Deans betook herself out to the gate to look for further manifestatons bearing upon the weather, and to see if Myron Holder was coming.

Mr. Deans shrunk up in his chair, blinking as he chewed, and taking his rebuff very philosophically. He was accustomed to his wife's "onsartainness," and when any of his remarks proved a boomerang, he simply consoled himself with the thought of "better luck next time" and subsided.

Mrs. Deans went out to the gate. It was early morning, and the sun was rising unseen behind heavy masses of water-charged clouds; there was a soft grayness of impending rain in the air, a fresh smell of springing grass, and new leaves, and newly turned earth; the gulls had deserted the lake, and were soaring in oblique circles through the gray, glisteningly white; the swallows from under the eaves of the barn were journeying forth to the pond for the clay to coat their nests; the sparrows were chirping saucily, as they robbed the young chicks of the grain scattered for them; from the field behind the barn came the bleating of the lambs, and now and then there sounded a distant *voice as Gamaliel* or the hired men shouted to their horses.

The bound girl, coming in from milking, paused to make grimaces at the unconscious back of her benefactress, an accomplishment at which Liz was an adept. After contorting her face horribly for a few moments, accompanying herself mentally with unflattering epithets addressed to the same unconscious back, Liz went on her way to the cellar, having very much enjoyed the relaxation of her facial muscles. Mrs. Deans stood looking down the road. Her eyes were red and watery this morning, and she wiped them on the corner of her apron. Far down towards the village she could descry a vehicle of some kind, but no one on the footpath. She returned to the house, and, satisfied that Myron Holder would not arrive for some time at least, went up to the garret to "sort over" the contributions that had been sent in for the mission-box that was going to the far West. First, however, she called to her husband to watch for Myron Holder's appearance, and rap on the wall with his stick when he saw her, so that she might come down and "be ready for her." Mrs. Deans always welcomed Myron Holder with sneers or rage in the morning, just as her grandmother greeted her with reproaches or revilings at night. There would have been something comic, had it not been so cruel and so sad, in the way these women played battledore with this girl as shuttlecock and tossed her from one to the other to be buffeted.

That morning Myron Holder had just got clear of the village, when she heard behind her the rumble of wheels; they drew nearer, and at last her down-cast eyes caught the image of a wagon, but she did not look up, and did not know whose it was until she heard Homer Wilson's voice.

"Good-morning, Myron," he said; "are you going out to Deans'?"

"Good-morning. Yes," she answered, blushing and ill at ease, for he had pulled up his horses.

"Then climb in and have a ride; I'm going to town," he said.

"Oh, no; no, thank you!" said Myron, hanging back.

"What for? Come, get in," he said.

Myron was so well used to being told what to do, and so little used to refusing, that she half made a step towards the wagon then—"No, I mustn't"—she paused—"you know—I——"

"Don't be a goose, Myron," returned he with decision. "Climb in here! I never see you these days, and we used to be good friends——" The infrequent tears rushed to her eyes. Without more ado, she went to the side of the wagon and set a foot on the step; the impatient horses started, and she felt herself half lifted in by Homer's strong arm. The horses sprang forward, to be soon checked, though, for Homer was evidently in no hurry that morning; indeed, the horses were restrained to an unwilling walk.

"How's things getting on with you, Myron?" asked Homer, trying to speak in a commonplace tone.

"Oh, just the same," she answered, unsteadily. "Mrs. Deans kindly keeps me on."

"Oh, she does, does she?" asked Homer. "Very good of her, I'm sure; she's a most charitable woman, Mrs. Deans is!"

Myron somehow felt her heart sink at this. Of late, aroused from the first bewilderment of her shame, she had wondered once or twice if Mrs. Deans was so wholly admirable in her life and intentions as she said she was; if she herself was so utterly vile. Homer's reply showed her, or so she thought, that she was wrong in doubting Mrs. Deans.

"*Yes,*" *went on* Homer, "Mrs. Deans is what Ma calls

a 'mother in Israel,' and no mistake. How many she's mothered! All these Home girls! And now struggling with you! Really, Myron, you might be thought most fortunate to get into such a household." Something in his voice gave Myron courage to look up. She did—but let her eyes fall before the bitter sneer that lurked on his lip, the scorn that shone in his eyes. In that instant she gathered, however, that none of it was for her; the next she was conscious of a desire to say something to Homer of Mrs. Deans' meanness, backbiting, insincerity, hypocrisy. Myron Holder had naturally a sweet disposition, but the happiest of us, even, have sometimes a longing desire to pull another down, and for a moment this temptation assailed her with almost irresistible strength. She was so inured to blame herself, that to hear another dispraised, and that other the woman who embittered each hour of the day for her, was perilously sweet. She half parted her lips, but the generous spirit that had survived so many blows, so much injustice, yet endured and stifled the impulse. She sat silent. A jingling of loose tires, a rattling of loose bolts, and the uneven beating of a lame horse's hoofs struck upon their ears; some one was coming from the village.

"Hullo," said Homer, without looking round, "here's old Crow Muir coming!" The young men of Jamestown had an irreverent habit of calling Mr. Muir "Crow"—due to the solemn hue of his garb. A poor compliment any self-respecting crow would have deemed it, at least, when Mr. Muir was attired, as he was this morning, in his oldest suit of black.

Mr. Muir's vocation compelling him to travel usually in a silent and slow way, he liked, when not bent upon an official errand, to go as swiftly and noisily as he could. He had an old piebald mare, the original plan of

whose anatomy was so obscured by lumps and distorted by twists as to be almost obliterated; she was very lame in the nigh forefoot and had the stringhalt in her off hind leg, so that her gait was somewhat startling to behold; her neck was long and lean, her head heavy, her nose Roman, her eyes set close together in a bald face, her tail was more like a mule's than a horse's; but despite these peculiarities, which by some people might have been considered disabilities, she was the fastest animal in Jamestown, and her progeny was noted far and wide among the local sports. The vehicle behind this gallant steed was as direct a contradiction to the stately hearse as could be imagined. It was a light wagon, set upon ridiculously high wheels, which, being always adjusted loosely at the axle, had a lateral as well as an onward movement; the body of the wagon was not more than five inches deep and painted a bright green (the same paint that coated the undertaker's veranda made his wagon a thing of vernal beauty). The seat was uncushioned and had rungs in the back, like a chair—in fact, it was a section taken from one of the long, old-fashioned desks that had been removed from the school a few years before this time.

In this state and equipage, then, did Mr. Muir overtake Homer and Myron.

"Homer, good-morning!" said Mr. Muir, solemnly, as he came abreast of them; and then he was past, his wagon jingling crazily, his knees nearly touching his chin, each wheel running at a different angle and leaving wavering tracks in the dust.

"Oh, Homer," said Myron.

"Well," said Homer, "what's the matter?"

"Mr. Muir—he'll talk," she said.

"You're quite right there," said Homer, with a vicious tightening of the lips. "It'll do him good." He gave the

restive horses a slap with the reins, but the next moment checked their sudden speed.

"Don't mind me, Myron," he said, flushing under his brown skin as he felt her nervous start. "I am in a bad temper this morning, and disgusted with the way people gabble about nothing." And then they drove on in silence again. As they passed the little cemetery, they saw the piebald mare, in a ridiculous "stand at ease" position, tied beside the gate.

"Hear of any one dead?" asked Homer.

"No, not a word," said Myron, her thoughts reverting painfully to her last visit to her father's grave.

"Well, maybe old Crow's gone to see if any of 'em are coming up," said Homer. Then, the thought suggested to him by the field of young springing grain opposite, he added, "Not much of a crop from old Crow's planting." After this grim speech there were no further words until they were opposite the wire fence of Deans' so-called garden.

"Myron," said Homer hastily, "any time you want a friend for anything, come to me, will you?"

"Yes," she said simply, looking at him with ineffable gratitude and wonder in her eyes. "But have you forgotten——"

"My memory's as good as most folks' is," said Homer gruffly; then, wishing once for all to let her see he accepted the facts of her life, he said: "What do you call your child, Myron?"

"My," she answered, with the indescribable mother-voice of love, "little My."

"A very good name, too," said Homer, with conviction. "I'm coming in to see him some day."

Myron fairly gasped in terror.

"Oh, no," she said, with entreaty in her tones and eyes;

"oh, no, promise you won't think of such a thing—promise you won't"—he was drawing up the horses at the Deans' gate, and she clasped both hands over his arm in her urgency. "Promise," she urged. He looked down at her, his face sombre; he gathered the beauty of her face and pleading eyes, his old self awakened for an instant from its bath of bitterness, and his old natural smile made his stern face bright and gentle as he said:

"Of course, I won't, if you don't want me to. Is it your grandmother?"

"Yes, and——" she unclasped her hands and began to descend. "Thank you so much," she said.

"For not coming?" he asked. His face was dark again.

"No; for speaking to me," she answered, as she turned quickly to the house, and he went on to the city, as fast now as his horses could spurn the miles, and he had gone some distance before his face lost the expression caused by her last speech; but long ere he reached the town, the old gloom again settled upon his countenance.

From the high window Mrs. Deans had watched Myron and Homer as they drove from the foot of the garden; as they passed the corner of the house she sped to a more advantageous window, arriving in time to see Myron unclasp her hands from his arm and descend from the wagon. Mrs. Deans could hardly restrain herself from calling aloud to them, and proclaiming her discovery of their "brazenness," if not from the house-top, at least from the attic window; but with much strength of will she denied herself and kept silent until Homer's wagon vanished, and she heard a vigorous rap-rap down stairs. Then she collapsed upon a heap of winter quilts that were piled in the attic and communed with herself.

"She was doin' some rare begging, but the Wilsons is *strong set when* they've made up their minds. But such

cheek! To drive her up to *my* door as bold as brass, and in no hurry out of sight, either; at least," bethinking herself, "he *did* drive off mighty quick, when once she got out; wonder if she *wanted* me to see him! Well, if *that's* her idea, 'twon't do her no good! She should have told me when I asked her; I won't take no notice, now; she can't get me to back down from what I've said; it's a terrible disgrace on Marian Wilson—well, they *did* talk about Marian and that stonecutter one time, but he went away, and it was all smothered up, but I had my own thoughts. Well, this is a judgment on her now; she was too set up when Homer came back to the farm; like's not, he was druv to it! Fine goin's on, I warrant, he had in the city! Thank the Lord, Maley's not sich as Homer Wilson; but then he's been brought up different, and it's all in the bringin' up. And there was something very queer about that stonecutter business; that would account for Homer's being so bad."

Mrs. Deans went about her work dreamily, struggling with the problem of Homer's depravity; her philosophy—like some other philosophies—first created a result, and then strove to invent circumstances to justify and explain it.

Mrs. Deans was sorely tried to decide what course was best to pursue: she would have liked to go at once to Mrs. Wilson, and proclaim her son's iniquity to her and see "how she took it"; she longed to go to Mrs. Holder's and announce that she had discovered the secret which had so puzzled the village; she would have dearly loved to shower upon Myron Holder the new and expressive epithets that were trembling upon the tip of her tongue, but the peculiar view she had adopted of the situation suggested to her that Myron Holder wanted the secret she had kept so long and so well discovered; and greater than her desire to see

her lifelong friend disgraced by the proof of her son's fault—greater than her desire to vindicate her own superior cunning—greater even than her desire to berate Myron Holder, was her determination to make Myron Holder suffer; so she decided to take no active step in the affair, no matter how hard the repression of her righteous wrath might prove.

She felt, however, there could be no harm in giving Mrs. White a hint of how things stood, for the Sunday before this Homer Wilson had tied up young Ann White's buggy shafts when he found her at a standstill on the way home from church. Here Mrs. Deans wandered a little from the main track, and dwelt a while on the enormity of Homer Wilson tearing along the roads, or through the woods, or along the lake shore, the whole Sabbath day, instead of going to church; here she recalled, with a shock, that Myron Holder never went to church either, and Mrs. Deans, putting two and two together, decided that not only of sin, but of sacrilege, were these two guilty.

Mrs. Deans felt fired with a great zeal for young Ann White's soul: if she should be led into marrying Homer Wilson, what a dreadful thing it would be! Not but what the Whites needed something to take them down a peg; still the pleasure of balking Homer, if he had any thoughts in Ann White's direction, would be something. Besides, although Mrs. Deans did not formulate this to herself, it would relieve the pressure of restraint to tell Mrs. White the circumstances, and Mrs. Deans concluded to herself: "It can't do no harm to let Ann White know. I miss my guess if she has her sorrows to seek; that Bing isn't ten removes off an idiot."

So Mrs. Deans contented herself all the forenoon by *staring at Myron* Holder with a concentrated glare of con-

tempt and triumph, varied only by sudden calls to Liz to "come back from there" whenever she approached Myron, and when Liz "came back," which she did in a hasty and indefinite way, not knowing very well why Myron had suddenly become so dangerous, Mrs. Deans would say:

"Haven't you got enough evil in you, but what you must learn more bad off of her?" or, "There ain't no use my striving to bring *you* up decent, when your natural bent is to be bad," or some other remark to the same effect.

In the afternoon, the rain heralded by so many infallible signs made its appearance, and Mrs. Deans perforce remained at home. She took her sewing to the kitchen, and set Myron and the bound girl to work to mend the grain bags; and as the storm outside whipped the maples, and struggled with the oaks, and stripped the horse-chestnut trees of their brittle blossoms, so the storm of Mrs. Deans' vituperation raged over the heads of the two girls sitting on the floor surrounded by the dusty grain bags. Liz was in such a state of nervousness that she was sticking her needle into her fingers at every second stitch, when Myron Holder began to feel the floor rising with her—the bags whirled round and round in a circle of which she was the centre; the floor ceased to rise evenly and tilted up—up—on one edge—tilted until it was perpendicular, and flung Myron Holder off—a long distance off—into an abyss of darkness, through which whirled great wheels of light that rushed toward her as if they would utterly destroy her, but always passed by a hair's breadth; the last one passed, its light vanished, the whirring of its rapid flight died away, even the darkness disappeared—Myron Holder had fainted. She still sat, needle in one hand, bag in the other. Liz reached across for another bag and chanced to knock *against her slightly*; Myron fell over like a log.

"She's dead!" screamed Liz, and sprang up with hysterical cries.

Mrs. Deans' face blanched.

"You fool, get out of the way!" she said, and pushed Liz aside savagely, as she rushed toward Myron's prostrate figure. "Take hold of her," ordered Mrs. Deans, in a voice that quelled the bound girl's hysterics. Together they got her to the door; Mrs. Deans flung it wide, and Myron opened her eyes with the summer rain beating in her face and the waving masses of green trees and tossing branches before her eyes. To that blankness succeeded a quick memory of its approach, a shuddering recollection of that final plunge into darkness, to be obliterated by physical weakness and nausea; she clung to the door to support herself, and Mrs. Deans released her hold of her arms.

"You can go lie down on Liz's bed till you come to," said Mrs. Deans, "and then you can go home for the rest of the day."

"Thank you," said Myron, and Mrs. Deans went to the dining-room, while Myron crept to the tiny kitchen bedroom—each unaware of the horrible bathos of Myron's speech. Mrs. Deans did not come to the kitchen for some time, and when she did Myron was gone—out into the storm unseen of any, to struggle through rain and mud to the village, "a reed shaken by the wind" indeed.

CHAPTER XI.

"All things rejoiced beneath the sun—the weeds,
The river, and the cornfields, and the reeds,
The willow leaves that glanced in the light breeze,
And the firm foliage of the larger trees."

THE rain that brought back sense and sound to Myron Holder lasted for three days, falling steadily during that time; it was succeeded by the most joyous of weather. The spring was past; the grass grew lush and green beside the little waterways that the rain had created by the roadside; these mimic rivers had in miniature all the diversities and beauties of their greater brethren. There was a gradual decline from the inland to the lake, and adown this many of these evanescent streams found their way.

The stream that passed the Deans farm was the very epitome of Life. Now a large stone obstructed its course and divided its shallow flood, which crept sadly round either side of this rocky islet, to gush gayly together beyond it; after a short space of calm it rushed against an upturned sod and, broken and ragged, fell in tatters over the brink into the little pool below, in whose tiny vortex floated twigs and bits of last year's grass, and perchance a glistening white feather from the breast of a gull; freed from its durance in the pool and not yet schooled to peace and patience, the stream sped on hastily and noisily, striving to find its way between the interlaced red roots of a cedar; its haste to get out into the sunlight defeated its object, and the close-knit fibres flung it back again and again, but it returned to the charge with tiny banners of foam and ripples of defiance; so the strife continued until the gathering ranks of water rose strong enough to toss the

foremost clear over the barriers, and the stream went on its way cheerily until the dark culvert that took it across the road was reached, and as souls that plunge into the darkness of death leave all behind them, so this little stream left its foam, its ripples, its burden of twigs and wisps of grass and all its infinitesimal flotsam and jetsam, and essayed the darksome passage, a naked little stream; once out in the light again, it rippled on reflectively, until at last, its "tribute wave delivered," it merged its identity in the lake—losing (and here we cry with breathless lips, "Let it be like the soul in this also!") losing all puny consciousness of individual existence, only aware of being a part of that shining reservoir, dispensing beneficent gifts to air, and blessing and being blessed by the sun, that shone down more sweetly now upon it than when it was a vain and fretting brook.

The broad burdock leaves grew so rapidly in these days that their unstable stalks could not sustain them, and they trailed near the ground, bleached and unhealthy-looking, defacing the plant they should have adorned, like purposes unfulfilled for lack of will.

The wood violets spent all their surplus sap in leaves, and their later blooms were smothered in this luxuriance of foliage, as good resolves die 'mid many words.

In the maples, besides the singing of birds, there was now to be heard the "lisp of leaves" murmuring nature's alphabet. The swallows did not fly about so wildly, nor the bob-o-link, singing, soar so high—for the swallows hovered ever near the gray eaves of the barns, where, in their clay houses, the white eggs were being patiently warmed to life, and the bob-o-link (that slyest of birds) lingered ever in the grass meadows, where, upon a nest hid most cunningly, its mate sat listening to its singing. The *ponds and the* margins of the lake were alive with wrig-

gling tadpoles, and Bing White hung enchanted over a pool left at the foot of his father's field where, when the sun was high, the water spiders darted hither and thither. It was not the insects Bing watched, but the shadows cast by them upon the sandy bottom of the pool; for, by a conspiracy between the water and the sun, the minute disks that form the feet of these creatures, and enable them to "walk upon the water" in very truth, were magnified a thousand times, and this enlarged refraction, like spots of gold, wavered through the water in consonance with the spiders' movements on the surface. When the sun shone brightly, the spiders came out in force, and darted about untiringly; it was as though the spiders wove a web of shining water, flinging round golden bobbins through the woof and weft of their fabric.

A little fawn-colored wild duck, belated in its journey to the north, came to this pool, a solitary but contented little bird, until Bing stoned it so persistently that it flew away one day, never to return. The spring grains were growing strongly, and the fall wheat was tall and vividly green, except that patches, bare save for knotty roots upthrown upon the surface, showed where, upon the high ground, it had been "winter killed," or spaces of bleached and yellowed blades indicated where, in the hollows, the heavy rains had "drowned it out." The blossoming of the fruit trees was past, that marvellous season of efflorescence and beauty, when the air is heavy with perfume and the paths strewn with petals—the rose and white of the apples, the mother-o'-pearl purity of the cherry, the fragrant ivory of the pears, loose-leaved plum flowers, and the hiding, faint-pink quince blooms—these and the peach blows that made gay and glad the gardens and the orchards.

And the woodlands and the lanes rejoiced also—for theirs were the cloyingly sweet blooms of the pea tree and

the insignificant-looking but honey-smelling flowers of the locust, the bitter-sweet blossoms of the wild plum, so finely cut in tiny petals, so filled with snow-white stamens, so thickly massed together as to make the tree seem a fragrant snow cloud; then there was the red and pink of the "natural" apples, the ungrafted trees that had sprung up in every neighboring woodland; their taste was insipid, and had a peculiar, smoky flavor, but their blossoms were not less sweet than those of their cultured kinsfolk, and side by side with them stood the "choke cherry" with its long sprays of fragile blossoms that nauseate with their odor. Best of all, either in woodland or garden, orchard or lane, there was the wild crab-apple, upon whose gnarled and thorny branches grew its unspeakably sweet flower. The pink-veined petals folded about its perfumed centre, or opening but an hour or two, to disclose its golden heart, then, paling and falling, overcome by its own breath; for in the perfume of the wild crab-apple there lies all the story of the year, all the life of love; it has taken to itself all the sweetness, the bitterness, the languors, the fever, the desire, the satiety, the distaste, the joy, the sting of winter, the swoon of summer, the expectancy of spring, the overcoming of autumn, taken all, and mingling it with that we dream of, but know not, offers it to us upon thorny branches. And the fruit of these blossoms is bitter.

When the bloom was gone from all the trees, then the bees began to hum about the currant bushes, sipping the sweets of their green flowers, and there rose from orchard and field the savor of grape bloom. For Jamestown sent many hundred tons of grapes to the wine factories every year, and around the fences or over the cedars, there grew the "fox" grape, the "chicken" grape, and the bitter wild *grape from which* they distill a syrup for the throat.

Mrs. Deans' garden was "made," planted from side to side with vegetables, daily growing higher; the leaves were thickening on the currant bushes, and the young grape leaves were losing their downy whiteness and growing green and thick. Young turkeys, goslings, ducks, and baby chickens disputed with each other for the food dispensed so liberally to them; but Mrs. Deans ruled her poultry-yard, as she did her other belongings, with a rod of iron. The turkeys were the aristocrats of the place; they ate milk, white curds and chopped lettuce, and boiled eggs minced fine, with pepper; the rest fared on common meal—only all the spare time the bound girl had was spent in digging worms for the ducks.

"See that big worm there, Myron," she said one day, pointing to a huge, wriggling worm that two ducks were disputing possession of; "see that worm? Well, that's Mrs. Deans; of all the trouble that contrary critter give me I can't tell! It near wore me out, a-digging and a-digging; now it's in trouble its own self—you see—it'll be torn in two yet, yes—glad of it—there it goes! That'll happen to Mrs. Deans some day, when the Lord gets hold of her. Hush? I won't hush! Ain't she always a jangling? Jangling is something I can't abide, and how she goes it about nothing at all! She'll be tore in two along o' her ways, see if she ain't." With which satisfactory and encouraging prophecy Liz betook herself indoors.

Mrs. Deans had never found the time to go to Mrs. White's, but when one day her son Gamaliel told her he had seen Homer Wilson and Myron talking together in the "open village street" the heart of Mrs. Deans burned within her, and she reproached herself that she had not gone sooner; if she waited any longer it might be stale news; if they were brazen enough to talk to each other on the street—*people*—Jamestown people—would not tell

to notice it; now that there was a possibility of other lips telling "young Ann White" of Homer Wilson's badness Mrs. Deans felt it incumbent upon her to act at once, to arise in her strength and baffle the designs of the evil one upon the unsuspecting citadel of young Ann White's heart. Mrs. Deans called it, to herself, "putting Homer Wilson's nose out of joint in that quarter anyhow," but the phrase matters little, the intention expressed being identical.

To "stir up the lazy and strengthen the weak" is a proceeding much to be admired doubtless, being enjoined by no less authoritative edict than the Westminster Confession; and however Mrs. Deans regarded the latter half of the injunction, she had nothing to reproach herself with in view of one of its requirements. That Mrs. Deans regarded all people under her as being lazy, as well as the majority of her neighbors, may be taken as granted; it will therefore be seen that she had little time for the latter half of the command. Before she left for Mrs. White's that day, she went to the kitchen and gave Liz and Myron an eloquent extempore narration of their past sins and shortcomings, their present delinquencies, their future state of sin and misery, proceeding to a peroration regarding the probabilities of their immortal lives, and rounding off her address with a pleasant prediction of eternal perdition for both of them. Having given them tasks they could not possibly perform before her return, Mrs. Deans turned her attention to her husband. As he could not move about much, and as he had a maddening gift for holding his tongue, Mrs. Deans was often exasperated by him; upon this occasion, having absolutely no handle to hinge her remarks upon, she contented herself with a few well-considered and audible reflections upon his *utter uselessness*, "either to God or man" as she put it,

which threw such a burden upon her "helpless" shoulders; then she picked up his plug of chewing tobacco and narrowly regarded how much of it was gone, with a view to gauging the quantity he consumed in her absence. He squirmed under this; it affected him more than bitter words.

Having made every one as uncomfortable as possible, Mrs. Deans went her way.

Myron and Liz went out to their hoeing, Liz saying when once out of earshot of Mr. Deans:

"Did ye hear her jist, Myron, with that talk about 'eternal lakes of burning'— what's 'eternal' but 'continual?'—an' if Mrs. Deans ain't a continual burning torment her own self, I'll never drink water! Ain't she now, Myron? Why don't you speak out and say what you think? Keep still? Told us not to talk? Of course she did! She'd stop the dogs from barking if she could; I'll talk all I like! Old Stiffen can't see me till I get past the third currant bush, and I'll take care to be quiet then— old wretch he is! I'd like to scald him some day to see if that would limber him up and take him out of the kitchen, a-watchin' and a-watchin'." Liz, as a matter of fact, talked more than she hoed; but she had worked hard in a compulsory silence since daybreak, so it was hardly to be wondered at that she should be both slow and voluble now.

Myron's own eyes were heavy, and as she bent above her hoeing, her hands were none too eager for the toil, nor her feet too ready to advance; she worked on steadily though, and was beginning a new row before Liz completed her first one; as Liz passed her after some time to begin her second row, she said in an explosive undertone:

"You can't scare me with no hell-fire after living along o' Mrs. Deans;" then seeing Myron paid no heed, she muttered to herself, "and old Stiffen, too, he'd sicken any devil, a-watchin' and a-watchin'."

Liz, it will be seen, was not the model child of story book fame; the girl was the ordinary type of her class, with a thousand inherited failings, a dozen minor vices; but against these she had a heart that ached for love, a tongue that told the truth though it earned a blow; a generous and impulsive soul: but, alas, in Mrs. Deans' house she absorbed naught of good to offset her faults, save the virtue of courage and endurance, which, seeing Myron Holder's bravery, she cultivated through shame.

The hours passed.

Watching the girls as closely as he could, Henry Deans sat blinking in the sun, like a malevolent lizard lying in wait for flies.

Mrs. Deans meantime made her way along the road to Mrs. White's. The White house stood back some distance from the road, and was approached by a long, narrow lane, bordered by weather-beaten rail fences, none too well kept, Mrs. Deans thought wrathfully, as she stumbled over a broken rail; the grass had grown so rank about it that it was almost entirely hidden. Mrs. Deans inveighed against shiftlessness in general, and the White type in particular, all the way to the front door, whose iron handle and heavy knocker bespoke the age of the house; it was, indeed, one of the old landmarks, built at a time when the settlers hewed the finest oak trees in the wood for their kitchen rafters, and begrudged not to use the magnificent black walnuts for their stairs. This house had been the first one in Jamestown to have shutters—massive, solid affairs of oak, adjusted and held in place by heavy bars of iron that extended diagonally across them; the Whites, however, were much distressed by the old style of these shutters, and a year or two previously had substituted modern green slatted shutters upon the front of the house.

Young Ann White answered Mrs. Deans' knock, and

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MRS. DEANS CALLS ON MRS. WHITE.

ushered her in with awkward cordiality. Young Ann White's name was Ossie Annie Abbie Maria White, named after "four aunts and her pa" as Mrs. White said. The Jamestown people pronounced the first three names with a strong accent upon the first syllable, and the middle syllable of *Maria* they clung to until they lost breath and relinquished it with a gasp; as they uttered it, Miss White's name was a sentence by itself.

Mrs. White came bustling in before Mrs. Deans got seated, and after expressing her pleasure at seeing her, saying, "I declare, Jane, the sight of you's good for sore eyes!" entered with great zest into the discussion of village gossip. Mrs. White's sitting room was an apartment that evidenced loudly the taste and industry of Mrs. White and her daughter. It had a "boughten" carpet on the floor, and upon this were strewn hooked mats of strange and wonderful design, trees with roses, daisies and blue flowers of name unknown, growing luxuriantly upon every branch; bright yellow horses and green dogs stood together upon the same mat in millenium-like peace, undisturbed by the red birds and white cats that enjoyed the same vantage ground with them; but finer than any of the others was the black mat placed in the centre of the floor, as being less likely to be trodden upon there; its design was a salmon-pink girl in a green dress. By what was little less than inspiration, Mrs. White had formed the eyes out of two large and glistening black buttons. The chairs were black haircloth, each adorned with a crocheted tidy worked by Miss White; the making of these tidies was her life—by means of them she divided her life into times and seasons. Her one tragedy was compassed by the unholy fate of one which, being just completed, fell into the paws and from thence to the jaws of a mischievous *collie* puppy, and was speedily reduced to

rags. Her great achievement was the making of a "Rose of Sharon" tidy out of No. 100 thread. She could always fix any date by recalling what tidy she was engaged upon at the time. There was the "Spider-web tidy," the "Sheaves of Wheat," the "Rose of Sharon," the "Double Wheel"; one she called a "Fancy patterning tidy," and another was known as the "One in strips."

The room had a large old-fashioned mantel-piece of heavy oak; beneath it had been a huge square fireplace, big enough to hold a roaring fire of logs, but the massive fire-board stood before it winter and summer now, for it was never used. The fire-board was also of oak, darkened to that tint that the virtuoso loves and the dealer in spurious antiques strives after in vain. But this year, Mrs. White had papered it over with wall paper, pink roses on a white ground, and a blue border.

"It does look so much more genteel and cheerful!" said Mrs. White, and Mrs. Deans agreed with her.

The mantel was decked with a gaudy china vase, with paper flowers in it; a lamp, in the oil of which was a piece of red flannel, thought to be decorative as it showed through the glass; a cross cut out of perforated cardboard, and two curious round objects like spheres of finely carven wood; these were clove apples. It was common in polite society in Jamestown to ask "How old is your clove apple?" The answer was usually given in years, and would have greatly surprised any stranger to clove apples. To make a clove apple, they selected the largest specimen of apple to be found (and in Jamestown that meant a *very* big apple indeed). Having got the apple, the next proceeding was to stick it full of cloves, as closely as possible; that was all—the cloves absorbed and dried the juices of the apple—the apple shrunk and shrunk, wedging the cloves *tighter and tighter* together; until at last they became so

tightly welded together by the pressure that it was absolutely impossible to pull, pry, or cut one out; they were popular ornaments in Jamestown sitting-rooms. Mrs. White, when any reference to clove apples was made, invariably said that she remembered the time when tomatoes were called love apples, and kept for "ornamings," by which she meant ornaments.

The walls of Mrs. White's sitting-room were hung with pictures; there was a highly colored print representing a pair of white kittens against a red velvet background, playing with dominoes; there was a glazed chromo of a preternaturally blonde baby, sleeping in a preternaturally green field, bestrewn with preternaturally white daisies; a woodcut of Abraham Lincoln, one of Queen Victoria, and a diploma for the excellence of Mr. White's fat cattle completed the decoration of the walls, except above the door, where purple wools on a perforated cardboard asked again the piercing question, "What is Home Without a Mother?"

There was a centre-table, with a large Bible overlaid with a crocheted mat upon it, and a home-made foot-stool that tripped you up every time you entered the room.

Mrs. Deans had brought no work with her, and when Mrs. White produced a basket and began to piece a block of a quilt, Mrs. Deans begged for thread and needle. Young Ann White rose to get them, and Mrs. Deans said:

"Well, Ann, now who's this quilt for?" The girl bridled and tossed her head until her rough hair stood on end; her dull skin and phlegmatic temperament made blushing an impossibility. Mrs. White broke in with boisterous good humor:

"Oh, Ann knows who it's fer all right enough; it's a poor hen can't scratch fer one chick, and that's all Sam and me has *got*—one apiece—Ann and Bing. Ann's got

eight quilts all pieced now; this is the album pattern. When I finish this, I'm going to work on a 'Rising Sun' and—show Mrs. Deans that lace you made fer pilly cases, Ann."

Ann went to obey.

"She's so set on them things," continued her mother in an undertone, with many nods and headshakings; "so set on 'em. It's really wonderful; it makes me real nervous sometimes. There was Sarah—my cousin twice removed by marriage on Sam's side—and when she had consumpting, nothing would do but she must have a boughten feather; time and time again I argued with her, but never to no account—a boughten feather she would have, and being near the end, and being the only one the Clem Whiteses had, why they took to it that they'd humor her. So one day off Clem started and got the feather; he went to a millingnery store, and he says, says he, 'If the feather don't suit the lady—if it ain't becomin,' he said, for the clerk looked up sharp; 'If it ain't becomin,' Clem said, being always one to use fine language, 'if it ain't becomin,' I'll bring it back and change it for something else.'

"So he took the feather home, and three days after Sarah died, real reconciled 'cause she'd got the feather; they was real afraid she'd ask them to bury it with her, she thought so much of it, but they'd head her off if they thought she was going to speak of it, and remind her her end was near, which didn't make her enjoy the feather any the less, but just made her say less about it. Well, when the end came, it came suddent and she had no time to ask any promises; but she held on to it and when they drawed the pilly away, she still had it in her hand; well, her mother took it back to the millingnery store and got *a whole black bunnit* for the price of that feather. It's

terrible what they do ask for them; they say Sam Warner's wife had more than an idea of getting one in the city when they went down to sell the wool, but I guess she thought that would be just a little more than his people would stand, and give up the idea—but pshaw! I wouldn't be surprised any day to see her with a feather; she's bought buttoned shoes for that young one of hers; why, my land! our Ann never had a pair of buttoned shoes till long after she had spoke in after-meeting.

"But Ann's so set on them things, it fairly makes me wonder if it ain't a warning that she'll be cut down. You know how 'tis with us all, Jane, 'the flower fadeth.'" Here Ann returned with various rolls of crochet trimming for Mrs. Deans to see; she unpinned the ends, extended them upon her black apron, and waited the praise she deserved. Mrs. Deans gave it liberally, but did not fail to describe the work she had seen at Mrs. Wilson's, left there by one of her market customers who came out to spend the day. Mrs. Deans described this production in such marvellous terms that Ann gathered up her treasures quite sadly, and as she pinned up each fat little roll wondered if by any possibility she could get the pattern.

Ann sat down down to a tidy of intricate design—her mother babbled on about Bing and Ann, and her chickens and her garden; Mrs. Deans felt irritated. The door of the sitting-room opened upon the veranda; it was flung wide open, and held back by a cloth-covered brick, and the sunshine streamed gloriously across the gaudy mats.

Mrs. White was flowery of speech, being much given to the quoting of Scripture and apt to indulge in poetical similes drawn from the poetry of Mrs. Hemans, as used in the school-books. She was herself a poet of wide local repute, having composed the epitaph for a son lost in babyhood; engraved upon his tombstone it read:

"Good-by, young William Henry White,—
The fever took you from me quite.
The time has come for us to sever;
But, William Henry, not forever."

Mrs. White wore her hair, still dark and abundant, in rows of curls. It was only after Ann grew up that she discarded the blue ribbon she had affected since her own girlhood.

Sitting in the sunshine, Mrs. Deans felt this comfortable self-satisfaction to be an unholy thing upon the part of the Whites. So she said abruptly:

"Isn't it a terrible thing about Homer Wilson? Well, it'll teach Marian a lesson; she set too much store on Homer altogether. I knowed what Homer Wilson was long before this came out!"

"Why, Jane, I never heard anything against Homer! What do you mean?" asked Mrs. White, looking over her spectacles at Mrs. Deans.

"Why, they say—but I don't want this mentioned, Ann; I want this kept particular confidential between us two, and no one else to be the wiser, though the talk's getting round, as others can tell beside me. But what folks tell is that if Myron Holder's young one ain't named Homer, it ain't because it hadn't ought to be."

"Well, my lands!" said Mrs. White, whilst her daughter said nothing, but got up and went out of the room.

"Yes," said Mrs. Deans, "that's what they say, and I could tell things. But standing in the light of one who's tried to do the best she can for everybody, I never said a word! But there—there's no use talking over them; the point was, I felt it a duty when I heard he was sitting up with your Ann."

Mrs. Deans paused—there was no reply—so she continued: "*I felt you* ought to know the truth of how things

stood; so putting aside my own feelings, as I have to do very often, I came to let you know what sort of a fellow Homer Wilson is."

"To think of it!" said Mrs. White. "Truly 'this life is but a fleeting show!' Homer Wilson! What he has said to Ann I can't say, not knowing; but as for sitting up, whatever sitting up was done was done irregular, now and then, as luck chanced; there was nothing regular, no promising, no conversational lozenges, no buggy drives. No, Ann ain't no call to be worried, though it's terrible to think how he'll suffer when he knows Ann is not for him, can never be his; no, that hope is gone—no, Homer Wilson, thou must go thy ways withouten help from Ann."

Mrs. Deans felt exasperated. "Such stuff and nonsense," she thought. "Homer Wilson would never look at Ann White, if he could get another girl; Ann White, indeed!" She woke from her silence with a start.

"Well, I'm glad it's no worse," she said; "only you'd better tell Ann to be careful, for people are so ready with their tongues."

"Jest let me hear any one mention Ann's name and his'n," said Mrs. White; "jest let me hear 'em, they'll have to prove their sayings! 'Tell it in the country, tell it in the court,' is my motto. I'd never stand no creepin', sneakin' talk about my folks!" Here she was interrupted by her son Bing, who dashed along the veranda, flung himself down on the open door-step, and ejaculated:

"Bats bring bedbugs."

"What?" said Mrs. Deans.

"For the land's sake, Bing, what are you talking about?" asked his mother.

"Bats," said Bing, chattering his words out with his customary rapidity. "Caught one in the back bedroom between the *shutter* and the window; bites like the mis-

chief; got round ears that stick up—got fur on it—got leather wings, and bedbugs under 'em."

"Well, it beats all," said his mother, and Mrs. Deans looked at him curiously. But keen as her eyes were, they saw no change in him from the boy of four or five years back. For although Bing was between sixteen and seventeen, he was no larger than a child of twelve: an ill-conditioned, withered, hard little figure. His frame was spare, his little face, with its high cheek-bones, was always flushed, as though fevered by a dry and burning heat; his eyes were very light blue, very small, very cruel-looking. They were set in a network of wrinkles. His hands were horny and thin. He stayed but a moment, then rushed off as quickly as he had come.

"Bing don't grow much," said Mrs. Deans, with a curious intonation in her voice and a covert glance at Mrs. White.

Mrs. White looked a little uncomfortable, and answered rather hastily:

"No, the Whites is all slow growers. Sam grew after we was married, and Sam's brother grew till he began to get bald!"

Mrs. Deans preserved a disagreeable silence.

Young Ann entered the room as composedly as she had left it.

"Where have you been, Ann?" asked her mother, a little sharply.

"Fixing curds for the turkeys," said the girl, placidly.

"Well, I declare, I'd forgotten it entire!" said Mrs. White. "I am glad to find that you have such a thoughtful mind."

"Oh, ma!" said young Ann, in an acme of admiration. Mrs. White smiled, as who should say, "I can't restrain my muse," and continued in the same voice: "Shall we go out *and see the* feathered tribe eat their humble portion?"

Mrs. Deans rose gladly, and out they went into the sunshine. It was one of those days—so perfect, if one can enjoy it without toil, in darkened rooms or shady nooks—so intolerable, if bodily toil beneath the blazing sun is demanded. They went about leisurely, watched the melancholy young turkeys picking daintily at their food, encouraged to the attack by the solitary little chicken that was domiciled in their coop. When the turkey eggs were hatching, careful poultry-keepers put one hen egg in with them, so that the chicken might "show them how to eat." This one, a vigorous little black Spanish chick, certainly performed its duties nobly—its compact little body darting here and there among the turkeys, staggering about on their long, fragile legs. They passed Bing, lying on his back under a chestnut tree.

Mrs. Deans and Mrs. White grew very affable over the poultry, and the clouds dropped down, with the dewy darkness of a moonless summer night, before Mrs. Deans went home.

She was, upon the whole, dissatisfied with her visit. Those Whites were so disgustingly equable—so ridiculously pleased with themselves—and that Bing White! of all the objects! Mrs. Deans slept at last, her brows drawn in the ill-natured pose her thoughts suggested.

The Whites slumbered peacefully, save where Bing lay, his eyes gleaming in the dark, as he dreamt long, waking dreams of ghastly pleasures; but he too slept at last, his fingers twitching as he slept, his lips like two streaks of blood.

Myron Holder slept the too-sound sleep of weariness, her yellow-haired baby on her breast, her face placid and calmed into severe lines of beauty.

Homer Wilson tossed and flung his strong arm above his head and murmured a woman's name, and crossed it with

another, clinched his upraised hand; and, murmuring, slept.

Deeper and deeper fell the silence; darker and darker grew the midnight; heavier and heavier sleep sank upon those different hearts; until they all beat with the measured cadence of oblivion—until, albeit delayed by devious paths and difficult gates, they all reached the poppied meadow of deep sleep.

CHAPTER XII.

"Lo! where is the beginning, where the end,
Of living, loving, longing?"

"But were there ever any
Writhed not at passed joy?
To know the change and feel it,
When there is none to heal it,
Nor numbed sense to steal it,
Was never said in rhyme."

It was late summer. The whirring of reaping-machines sounded upon every side; the roads were strewn with grain from the harvest wagons; the air was murmurous with insects; the ground, parched and thirsty; the grass, sere and harsh; the leaves, laden with dust; the birds sang only in the hours of earliest dawn or in the twilight. At noontide, the horses' flanks dripped sweat, and the men's faces and necks were blistered with the heat. The cows stood knee deep in the ponds, and flicked at the flies with their long tails. The ponds were low, and their wide margins of mud were alive with tiny frogs, that hopped about in thousands. Upon the surface of the water was *a glaze of curious* animalculæ, as red as blood. Clumps of

bullrushes and tasselled tufts of reeds grew in the water, and dragon-flies flitted through the green stems, like darting flashes of blue light. The Jamestown children called them darning-needles; and being assured of their propensity for sewing one's ears up, viewed them with serious apprehension. Often the birds, their breasts panting with heat, came to the ponds, and, fluttering to the margin, splashed the water over their little backs. They were timid, though, and liked better to find a spot where the deep imprint of a hoof was filled with water than to bathe in the ponds.

The little streams by the roadside had long since disappeared, and the famous stream on the Wilson farm, that welled up from the "living rock," stole along so sluggishly that it scarce stirred the watercresses that grew along its course.

It was the culmination of the year's endeavors: a hard season on man and beast; from day-dawn to dark was heard the shouting of men, the trampling of horses, the noise of machines—a feverish season, the fruition of a twelvemonth's expectancy.

"A good harvest, and fine harvest weather," said one and all.

It was natural that these weeks of incessant labor should tell upon the men—indeed many of them looked utterly worn out, with red rims encircling their eyes, and faces from which each drop of moisture seemed to have oozed; but Homer Wilson, during the excessive heats of that summer, looked worse than any of his neighbors. His blue jeans hung loose upon him; and when he threw aside his smock, his shoulders seemed sharp and thin under his shirt. The outline of his strong jaw was clearly defined, and by reason of the lack of superfluous flesh the contour of his head was strikingly apparent, and suggested almost

unpleasantly the dominant force of his character. His eyes were sunken; and although at the end of a long day's work his face might grow ashen, his muscles twitch nervously, and his strong fingers tremble, yet the fire in his eyes remained undimmed.

He could not sleep. At night he used to go to the lake—very solitary then, when the fishing season was past—and plunging into the water swim far out in the moonlight. Sometimes he beat his arms upon the water at each stroke, striving to communicate his own excitement to the water, that shone up with such maddening placidity to the stars. Sometimes he would swim out until the shore behind him was but a dimness, seeming as unsubstantial as the clouds; then, turning on his back, he would float there, silent, his eyes searching the sky. The harvest moon—

> "The loveliest moon that ever silver'd o'er
> A shell for Neptune's goblet; she did soar
> So passionately bright,"

floated above him. Silence was upon the face of the water, and he, in the embrace of the wave and the night, was alone indeed.

"The lidless train of planets" passed him by; the moon drew a mantle of mist about her and sailed away. A premonitory shiver crept along his limbs; he reached the shore, chilled to the bone; but the heat at his heart still parched him with thirst, for there had awakened within him a great longing for loving eyes, a great hunger for woman's touches, a great dread of his own solitariness, a great disgust of himself. He was realizing slowly, numbly, his own decadence, groping for some rope by which he might pull himself up out of the abyss into which he had fallen.

It is doubtless nobler to dispense with the rope and climb *out of the pit* unaided; the rockiest precipice may be

hewn into painful steps, but in shifting sands who can form a stairway?

"Seems to me, Homer," said Mrs. Wilson one day, as she stood moulding her bread in the early morning, "seems to me you need something; now there's yarbs just hanging up and spilin' for the want of drinking; there ain't anything more buildin' than yarbs is—'The yarbs of the field,' it says in the Bible, which means all yarbs, and I have them mostly there." Here she glanced at the long row of paper bags which, tied round the stems of the dried plants, hung along one side of the kitchen. "Maybe it's ague workin' on you, or m'laria you're sickening for; I'll make up some boneset agin noon and——"

"Don't make any brews for me, mother," said Homer. "I don't need any; it's the heat." He was putting oatmeal into the water-pails for the men to take to the field.

"There," said his mother, "I knowed it! I'd no hope as you'd be led by me in this any more'n anything else. Well, it's to be expected, I suppose. I know who the nursin' and settin' up will fall on, but I kin stand it; I've had to bear with a good deal in my time, and the Lord 'll give me strength for this, too—but it does seem hard." She sniffed, and, wiping away an imaginary tear with her floury apron, left a smudge of white upon her rubicund countenance.

"It is hard," said Homer, very quietly, and went out, pails in hand, to where the horses stood ready harnessed for the day. The hired men were sticking branches of walnut leaves on their bridles and in the backbands, and bathing their flanks and breasts with smartweed oil, to keep off the flies.

Homer gave the men their pail of oatmeal and water, and went to his own team. As he passed his horses, he put out his hand to take the nearest one by the bridle. It started and swerved nervously from his extended hand.

His face lowered for an instant; the next moment it flushed as though his swarthy cheek felt the impatient blow he had given the horse the day before. He took the lid off his pail and let the horses drink the contents, giving them the pail alternately; each pushed its nose down through the cool water to get at the meal at the bottom, making a great sucking as it did so, and resisting stubbornly the efforts of the other to usurp the pail. They made short work of the draught, but were loath to give up the pail, and stretched their noses after Homer as he hung it upon a fence-stake. He took their bridles and proceeded to the field, their harness-chains clinking, the leaves on their heads and backs rustling, their noses quivering as they licked at the grains of oatmeal sticking to their bits.

Homer was reaping the west field. A forty-acre expanse of growing grain it had been a few days before, but now it was all down save a little square in the hollow, at one corner of which stood the self-binder, an ungainly affair, with its windmill-like arrangement for pushing the sheaves along.

The shocks of grain stood round and round this square of standing wheat, as if they fain would protect it from the fate that had laid them low; but Homer and his horses threaded their ranks, and soon the lumbering machine was in motion, leaving a track of prostrate sheaves that presently the men would take in pairs, and, putting eight together, leave them for the sun to dry.

Through all that long forenoon Homer thought of his mother. It was not "yarb tea" he needed, but

> "To take in draughts of life from the gold fount
> Of kind and passionate looks."

The heat grew intense. The horses were panting, the *sweat lathering from* beneath the harness-straps; a stifling

dust was rising from the wheels and covering Homer's face with a grayish veil; the grasshoppers fled in thousands before the machine; the grain gleamed dizzily golden in the sun. It was just the color of *her* hair—perhaps the feverishness of the heat made the thought unpleasant. That hair had been bright enough to drive him almost mad, but it was not brightness he wanted now, nor gayety, nor laughter; he wanted the benison of calm eyes, the shadow of cool hair, the tenderness of tears, the strength of a tried soul, and out of this chaos of longing was slowly evolved a figure.

Beginning with a dark cloud, that hovered for a time before him and then floated away fragment by fragment till all was gone save enough to halo round a pale and steadfast face, with dark locks of hair, and the face at first only outlined by the curving tresses, gradually assumed features—dark eyes and

> "most tender brows,
> Meant for men's lips, to make them glad of God
> Who gives them such to kiss"—

pale, sorrowful lips, and a chin which told of strength to endure, yet pleaded most eloquently against a test; and then came patient shoulders and the bosom of a mother. He gazed at this figure long—or so it seemed. It eased his eyes, and the heat was really blinding; even this vision could not blot it out. He closed his eyes. The next moment frightful sounds confused his ears, he felt a sharp pain in his head, heard a cry—surely from the lips he had just seen in his waking dream. . . . With a great gasp, Homer Wilson came back from his momentary swoon to find himself lying on the ground, his machine a few yards in advance, and Myron Holder bending over him, with tears *raining down* her white face.

"Oh, Homer—Homer," she cried, "are you killed?"

"What is it, Myron?" he said, and tried to put his hand to where the pain was—but failing to reach his head, it faltered and fell upon one of Myron's arms, over which it closed. He realized that her arm was under his head, and that he was leaning heavily upon her. He tried to gather himself together, but one of his feet was held fast. He looked at her inquiringly. At that moment she was the source of life—knowledge—everything to him. The blood was streaming from a cut in his temple. She replied to his unspoken question promptly.

"The reins are tangled round your feet," she said. "Oh, I thought I couldn't get here in time! I thought they would surely drag you to death; and you fell so near the wheels, I——" here she gave way to a paroxysm of tears. She tried to stifle them. The sight set Homer's manhood for a moment again upon its throne. He untied the neckerchief he wore, clumsily dried her tears, and then applied it to his own head. She rose. Just then two men came in sight; they had been on their way home to dinner. Turning at the gate, they had seen something was wrong, and hastened back. As they approached, Myron snatched up her sunbonnet from where it had fallen and tied it on with trembling fingers.

"How was it, Homer? What's up?" called the men as they drew near. Homer's evanescent strength was gone; he was supporting himself on one elbow, upon which he seemed to be whirling, as on a pivot. He looked at Myron, and she answered for him:

"I was looking for Mrs. Deans' turkeys; they've strayed," she said. "As I came over the knoll, I saw him drop the reins and fall; I ran as hard as I could and stopped the horses; they were dragging him; he must *have struck on a stone* when he fell." She paused; her voice

was trembling. "It's the sun," she said; and, turning, was over the crest of the knoll, her sunbonnet disappearing among the stacks on the opposite side, before the men made any comment.

As she disappeared, Homer's long-tried elbow gave way, and his head sank upon the stubble.

The men untied the leather rein from his foot, tied up his head as well as they could, steadied him as he rose to his feet, and helped him to mount the gray horse.

A day's rest set him right. The touch of sunstroke had been neutralized by the cut, whose bleeding had relieved the pressure on the brain and in a measure from his heart, for he no longer battled with intangible desires and maddening uncertainties of purpose; he yearned with his whole heart for the clasp of Myron's Holder's arms.

His mother heard the story of his accident and by whom a much more serious one was averted. She was thoroughly enraged and excited. She harped upon the one string until Homer's new-found store of patience reached an end, and he was fain to betake himself out of doors in the evenings until sleep stilled his mother's tongue.

It was a week or so after his fall—the wound on his temple had already healed in the wholesome skin—when, one night as dusk fell, he was beset with desire to see Myron. The vision he had had in the field returned to him often now; that strange vision—compound of reality and dream, part wrought of the needs of his own heart, part woven of the glimpses his reeling eyes caught of the woman's figure in the distance. As he had emerged from the chaos of indefinite yearnings to a definite desire, so he had put aside all women for one woman; to his credit be it told, he thought of Myron Holder as she was—the disgraced mother of a fatherless child. He could draw no fine distinction between letter and spirit, deduce no hair-

splitting arguments to bear out his views, being only a rough countryman, unused to subtle mental processes. But he decided for himself that it was not muttered rites and outward forms that made the mother, but all the dolorous agonies of maternity. Which of them had this woman not endured? What jot or tittle of woman's horrible heritage had not been hers? And what more holy than a mother?

"God knows," he said to himself, as he strode along that night to the village, "a woman needs to be pretty bad before she's not good enough for the average man!" He had reached the fence round the Holder cottage—that fence in which the gaps grew greater and greater as old Mrs. Holder used the pickets for kindling-wood—and was just about to enter quietly, when Gamaliel Deans drove up. He recognized Homer and called out:

"Hi, there! Ho! What are you lookin' for?"

"A lift out to old Carroll's," said Homer promptly, cursing Gamaliel in his heart.

"Well, I'm yer man, then," said Gamaliel. "I'm just goin' for the vet. The sorrel mare's bad—sunstroke."

"Too bad," said Homer, springing into the light wagon. "Who was driving her?"

"I was—worse luck," said Gamaliel, sulkily. "I seen her stagger, but I thought she could make it to the end of the swathe; but she dropped in her tracks, and there she's laid since, with us pouring water on her head. It don't seem to do her much good, though, and she was beginning to kick out when I hitched up and started."

"Well," said Homer, and he had a grim satisfaction in saying it, "if she was beginning to strike out, you may as well go home, for she'll die!"

"I guess she will," said Gamaliel, philosophically; "but things was gettin' pretty hot round there, and I thought *it safe to make* tracks. Marm's in a regular ramp over it!"

"No wonder," said Homer severely; "she's a fine mare."

The twinkling lights of Mr. Carroll's window were in view. They neared them swiftly. Gamaliel half-pulled up and Homer sprang out.

"So 'long!" said Gamaliel. "This is a matter of life and death, ye know," he added, chuckling at his own wit. He drove on quickly, speculating as to whether the mare was dead. She was.

Homer meanwhile stood a moment irresolute, as the wagon disappeared. He had spoken upon impulse when, in answer to Gamaliel's inquiry, he said he was going to Mr. Carroll's. It was the first name that entered his head, and chosen for that reason.

Homer had once gone a great deal to old Mr. Carroll's, but never had resumed the visits since his return to the farm. He shrank morbidly from observation then, and old Mr. Carroll's eyes were sharp. This night, however, he decided to go in; he feared no man's eyes now. He rapped at the door and waited. He could hear the tapping of the old man's cane, then saw a light beneath the door, as Mr. Carroll called out in well-rounded tones for so old a man:

"Who goes there?"

"Homer Wilson!" shouted Homer.

"Pass Homer Wilson!" said the old soldier, and pulling back the simple bolt, let his visitor enter. Through a dusky narrow hall, to a room with very heavy wooden rafters and whitewashed walls, he led the way.

Those walls were a great saving of paper to him, Mr. Carroll was wont to say; and that there was reason in his statement could be readily seen, for all the farm accounts, the taxes, the mill accounts, the dates of any events he wished to remember, with any stray memorandum of a chance reflection or idea he wished to see in words, were pencilled upon the walls.

On the last night of the old year, Mr. Carroll had the walls whitewashed, and began a "clean sheet with four big pages," as he said, every New-Year's.

One of his pleasantest reflections was that he had never yet needed to begin the new year with any debts staring him in the face, "and no one owing me, either," he would say, as though that too were a triumph; but certain people said old Mr. Carroll was a fool in this; he was so set on carrying out his whim that he whitewashed over accounts that were still due him, because, of course, it was for his own selfish gratification, and not from any generosity that he forgave certain needy families the little debts they owed for flour, and hams, and chicken-feed!

Mrs. Deans considered this sinful; and, impelled by her usual sense of self-sacrificing duty, spoke to him upon the subject once, saying, to clinch her argument, that "he'd have more money for foreign missions, if he didn't throw his substance away on those miserable, ailing, complaining paupers over Stedham way." But Carroll had speedily brought the discussion to a close by demanding, with some heat, what possible interest he could have in "a batch of naked niggers, ma'am"—an irreverent way of referring to the interesting heathen, surely.

"Sit down, Homer; sit down!" said his host, pushing a chair toward him with a gesture of genuine hospitality; "sit down, and we'll have a glass of something."

He went to a cupboard, whose diamond-shaped glass panes were backed by faded green silk, produced an old-fashioned heavy glass decanter, two glasses, some sugar and old silver spoons—talking all the time. His lameness necessitated several trips to the cupboard, and as he brought each object and set it down on the table he would pause a moment, feign a start, and say—"Tut—*tut—how forget*ful I am!" and jauntily journey back,

until he had all the requisites for a brewing of hot whiskey. So well he did the little by-play that he almost believed himself that it was forgetfulness that caused him to make repeated trips for the few articles and not the necessity for a cane, which left him only one free hand.

"A cold drink for a cold day, and a hot drink for a hot day; that's my idea," said the old man, settling himself into his chair with a suppressed twinge as he twisted his lame leg. "So now, you put a match to the fire, and we'll see if it's a good one."

Homer lit the fire, already laid, and the copper kettle placed upon the stove soon began to sing. Homer had talked readily enough at first, but he was growing absent-minded, his thoughts wandering back to that dilapidated cottage in the village. Presently the glasses of hot whiskey steamed between them. During the process of concoction Mr. Carroll related, with many strong expressions and much richness of detail, the idiocy of Male Deans, by whom he had sent to town for lump sugar. Lump sugar was an unknown commodity to Male, and he insisted there was no such thing, and declared Mr. Carroll couldn't "get the laugh on him that way." At last Mr. Carroll resorted to strategy. He wrote out a list of things he wanted from the grocery store, and smuggling loaf sugar in at the bottom of the list, gave it to Male and told him the grocery man would have all ready for him as he passed from the mill. So he got the lump sugar. Homer was a little hazy himself as to the existence of, or necessity for, lump sugar, but evidently it was of vital import to Mr. Carroll.

"Yes," the old man said, splashing another lump into his second glass of hot whiskey, "the ass! I've no doubt he'd put filthy loose sugar in this—floor-sweepings." Then came silence. Homer felt he must say something; he cast about for a subject; an incident of the day suggested itself.

"We killed a copperhead snake in the rye, to-day," he said; "the first I've seen in years. I was cutting a road round the field for the machine with the cradle, and it darted at me. I killed it with a fence-rail. It was an ugly beggar, and a good three-foot long."

"A snake!" said old Carroll. "A snake! There's many kinds of snakes. Copperheads are dangerous, and rattlesnakes are, but there's worse snakes than either. You killed it with a stick? Did I ever tell you about the man I knew who killed so many snakes?"

"No," said Homer, looking at him, for his tone was strange. "No. Who was he?"

"He was a man," said Mr. Carroll, looking fixedly at his guest, "he was a man that overcame many snakes of many different kinds, and how he fared at last I'll tell you."

He rose, snuffed the two candles, snipping off their wicks adroitly with a pair of old brass snuffers, and sat down, again fixing his gaze upon Homer's face. The tinderwood fire in the stove had died away to a mere glow of crisping embers; the kettle sang in dying cadence; its steam and the steam from the glasses floated athwart Homer's vision of Mr. Carroll's body, seeming to give greater keenness to the alert face, and the eyes which, always bright, seemed to glint to-night with absolute brilliancy.

"It was some time ago," said Mr. Carroll, "that this man I speak of used to kill the snakes. He had a peculiar dislike to all snakes, for a friend of his had had the life squeezed out of him in the folds of a serpent, and another friend had been bitten by one, so that he too died, having first gone mad; and another had the very breath of life sucked from him by a sly snake, so that he died—died *himself, body* and soul, and never knew it: only his

friends saw the corpse of his old self, and knew their friend to be gone from their midst and only his semblance left, and they rejoiced much when at last this semblance died also, and they could bury it decently, like other corpses.

"There was no wonder my friend hated snakes.

"He waged war upon them; and it was his method when he found one, to take it by the tail and, with a sudden jerk, snap its head off. He killed a great many in this way; and it was always his habit to search for the head. He longed to look into the eyes, and learn wherein the power lay by which they deceived and deluded men until they stung them; but he never could find the head. Between disappointment at this, and despair because the more snakes he destroyed the more there seemed to be, my friend grew very sad. He had a horrible pain at his heart too, that no drug could ease. Time went on and the pain grew no better—it even shot through his head sometimes; but my friend persevered, and no snake escaped him.

"Well, one day he was walking in his garden, under his own trees, within his own walls, where it would be thought no snake could come, when a snake, more brilliant in color than any he had ever seen, crossed his path. For the first time, he understood a little of the feeling that makes a man spare a snake because it is beautiful; but he put the thought from him, and, catching it by the tail, jerked off its head and flung aside the body. Then he began to search for the head, feeling if he could but look into the jewel eyes of that snake that all the mystery of men's delusions would be revealed to him; and, knowing the secret of their delusions, surely he could dispel them.

"He bent to his search, but felt such a great pain in his heart that he stood up, casting his eyes down upon

himself, for the pain was so great it seemed his heart would burst the bonds of his ribs; and as he looked, he saw the swelled eyes and forked tongue of the snake's head, for it had fastened on his breast above his heart. He looked again; it was gone. With wild haste, he tore off his coat.

"It was not there. His waistcoat—no sign of it. He dragged his clothing from him till he stood like Adam in the garden, and then he knew that that snake's head and all the others were in his own heart. Standing naked in his garden, he felt the snakes in his heart, and knew that his labor for mankind was vain—knew that not till he could rend and read his own living heart would he understand and dispel the delusions of men. The disappointment made him mad. It was the disappointment, nothing else—not the pain of the snakes, for many men have snakes in their breasts, she snakes, that amuse themselves by seeing how tight they can tie their hair about the heart."

The old man drained his glass. Homer was glad there was a little left in his tumbler—he swallowed it hastily.

"Rattlesnake oil is a grand thing for weak eyes," Mr. Carroll said, composedly; "and for horses' eyes it hasn't any equal."

"That's true," said Homer, "but it's pretty expensive—five dollars an ounce."

"Yes," returned his host, "old Dargo used to try out the oil and then eat the cracklings; but the best oil for medicine is got after letting the snake hang a while."

"So they say," said Homer; "but I never could bring myself to have anything more to do with a snake than to smash it with the first thing I could catch hold of."

They talked on a little longer, then Homer rose. "I must be getting along," he said; "I've quite a walk *before me.*"

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"LOOK AT IT," HE SAID, "LOOK AT IT WELL!"

"Well, come back soon," said Mr. Carroll, lighting him to the door with a wavering candle. Homer had his hand on the latch, when the old man said suddenly:

"Hold the candle a minute." He felt in his pocket, and drew forth a small black case, opened it, and thrust it before Homer's eyes. "Look at it," he said, "look at it well, and then you'll know a snake the next time you see one—one of the dangerous kind, not a simple copperhead, or a gentle rattler." In the midst of the glow of a golden background, dimmed here and there by a pearl, was a painted face—fair enough to woo a king, false enough to sell a kingdom. Homer looked, and somehow understood all its beauty and treachery.

Mr. Carroll shut the case with a snap, took the candle, and Homer let himself out.

"Good-night, Homer," called the old man. "Come back soon."

"Good-night. I will," said Homer, and the door closed between them.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Pleasure is oft a visitant, but pain
Clings cruelly to us—"

"Whoso encamps
To take a fancied city of delight—
Oh, what a wretch is he!"

CHURCH was in. That meant that all the respected and self-respecting people of Jamestown had come forth, morally and physically clothed in their best, and bestowed themselves as comfortably as circumstances permitted in the wooden pews of Jamestown's only church.

From the preacher's desk, the congregation looked like a human theme with variations, the original *motif* being a stolid, expressionless mask of flesh, unanimated, immobile, with rudely carven features, and no decided tints. Upon this primitive scale nature had rung every change her shackled hands could compass; but between the highest note, struck perhaps in Ossie Annie Abbie Maria White, whose face was inoffensive, and the lowest personified by old Ann Lemon, whose countenance was a mere mass of flesh, there was but a short thought. The men were sandy-haired, meagre, undersized; or heavy, florid, dark, with lack-lustre eyes and coarse lips.

It was a delightful autumnal day—a day more provocative of tears than laughter, more suggestive of retrospect than anticipation; a day to dream old dreams, feel old heartaches, read old books, tell old tales, hear bygone singing, recall lost voices; a pure, sweet day—the air rarefied by the first touch of frost; a day, in short, to remind one of the sweet, the sad, the strange in life; but withal, a day to perfect the tint on the apples, mellow the juices of the late grapes, and promising a "fine spell of good weather for the fall ploughing," as each male member of the congregation had said to each other male member that morning.

Mother Earth got but little rest at the hands of these eager seekers. Hardly had her bosom been shorn of its crop of a yellow grain before the keen ploughshares were again plunged into the soil and it was lacerated afresh, and the man looked best content that morning behind whose plough there lay the greatest number of brown furrows, for the fall ploughing was of great furtherance when the rush of the spring came on; so the horses, loosed from the lumbering reaping machine, were yoked *to the plough, that* most graceful of all farmer's implements,

and strained at their collars as it turned the furrow, sending its earthy fragrance to mingle with the fruity savor from the vineyards.

Light mists, prophetic of the later haze, floated in shreds and wisps across the fields, and gathered and lingered about the trunks of the trees in the woodland.

The birds were silent, and daily V-shaped flights of ducks and wild geese passed over the village, winging their way to the south.

Service went on in the church, to the staid and sedate measure of well-understood and long-established usage.

Ann Lemon was nodding off the intoxication of the night before in a pew well to the front. Ann felt she needed to assert her religious feelings lest there be some doubt of their existence.

Behind her sat Mr. and Mrs. White, young Ann, and Bing—the first three mentioned of the family looking as gloomy and downcast as their self-complacency permitted. Bing blinked wickedly in his corner, making sly swoops at the sluggish flies, and tearing them in bits when he captured any.

Across the aisle Clem Humphries flourished. Clem was one of those world-worn wrecks that are cast away and left stranded in nearly every small village the world over. How they drift there no one knows; whence they come no one cares; why they stay they could not tell themselves. Fate rattles us all in her dice-box, and we lie where we fall.

Clem was by turns a fisherman, Mr. Muir's assistant, a knife-grinder, a peddler; he had superior skill in making axe-handles, and out of wire he could twist and twine the cunningest of traps. He was acute and wise in his day and generation—at heart a scoffing old vagabond; yet he professed to be most religious, and evidenced

it in the same way as the people about him did, by going to church with painful regularity, where he sat, a sore rock of offence to Mrs. Deans, for Clem was fain to relieve the tedium of the service and aggravate Mrs. Deans (whom he hated) by a succession of tricks that irritated her almost beyond endurance.

Mrs. Deans sat immediately behind Clem, and pursed her already pursed-up mouth, sniffed her already pinched-in nose, and glared at him fiercely from her chronically inflamed eye, but all to no effect. He was full of offence, and Mrs. Deans had several times accused him in after-meeting of "conduct misbecoming in a Christian," but Clem had answered to the charge so volubly, so diplomatically, so humbly that the rest of the church members, and particularly Mr. Prew, the minister (to whom Clem always ostentatiously removed his hat), decided that Mrs. Deans had "a pick" at Clem, and regretted a little that such a pious woman should stain her noble record by such complaints as she made against this humble follower.

He had an evil habit of setting his stout stick upright beside him in the pew, balancing it with a skill all the boys of Jamestown emulated in vain, and then placing his hat upon it, so that in full sight of the congregation, it stood perilously balanced, but never falling, during the entire time of service.

A strange minister had once been sadly disconcerted by the sight of the immovable hat in that pew. He could see nothing of what supported it, and could hardly restrain his wrath at the irreverence of the dwarfish individual who sat covered in the Lord's house. Animated by the thought, he seized the sword of the Spirit and began to fight against this evil one. He dilated upon the perils of irreverence until the majority of his listeners dared hardly breathe. *He thundered forth* the denunciation of the wicked and

stubborn of heart until all the women wept, led by Ann Lemon, who, by reason of excessive piety and much gin, had no nerves left at all, and who showed her emotion by a series of subdued howls. He exhausted vituperation and himself, and sat down—a beaten man, for the hat was unmoved, whilst Clem beside it was rolling up his eyes and trying to induce a tear—an effort beyond even his art.

When the preacher discovered the true state of affairs, which he did when he saw Clem pick up the cane and its burden, carry it to the door, give it a jerk, bending his head at the same time, and so receive the hat at his own peculiar angle, he felt as if all good was but a dream and a delusion.

Clem every Sunday produced a large and not over-clean handkerchief tied in many intricate knots. These he untied painfully and laboriously with teeth and fingers, until he reached the last, which, when untied, disclosed a copper cent, which was his weekly contribution. This performance he made an absolute torment to Mrs. Deans, but with the cent he made her life a burden. He dropped it, and scrambled around on his hands and knees for it. He polished it on his trousers until it seemed as if he might wear the fabric through. Worst of all, he put it on the back of the seat before him, where Mrs. Wilson's plump back must inevitably knock it off. Mrs. Wilson, despite her many trials and the multitude of diseases she believed were concealed about her person, was very stout, and therefore subject to all the fatigues incident to bearing such a burden of flesh. In spite of this, however, Mrs. Wilson was animated by an eager desire to do her duty as became a "mother in Israel," and by her deportment convey the impressive lesson of example to the less holy members of the flock. With this end in view, she strove to attain an upright and rigid position of an uncomfortable

piety; but the flesh is weak. Presumably the weakness increases in ratio to the flesh, for before the first prayer was over Mrs. Wilson was beginning to settle. When the preacher announced his text, she usually took a fresh grip of her failing resolution, and assumed a ramrod-like pose, but it was of short duration. She gradually collapsed, her shoulders drooped, the back of the pew dented further and further into the broad black expanse that leaned against it.

Clem's penny crept nearer and nearer the edge as the encroaching back advanced. Presently Mrs. Wilson, worn out in her efforts to listen to the sermon and fight against her own lassitude at one and the same time, gave way, and, with a sigh, leaned back restfully. The penny flew off, and Clem, whilst apparently gazing at the preacher so attentively as to be oblivious of all else, reached forward and caught it adroitly, to place it again in jeopardy, and then again to lose sight of its peril. This performance, being repeated a half-dozen times during one service, enraged Mrs. Deans beyond expression. One unlucky day, she prodded Clem in the back with a rigid forefinger, and upon his turning round, which he did with an exaggerated start that vibrated through the whole congregation, she made a sharp gesture of withdrawal, and gazing at the offending penny, just then trembling on the edge, left the rest to Clem's understanding—a perilous thing to do, for Clem chose to interpret the signal in quite a different way than she intended.

Down Mrs. Wilson's black merino back there strayed a long light brown hair. To Mrs. Deans' consternation, Clem reached gingerly forward, took the hair, and, with the suddenness Mrs. Deans' gesture had indicated, withdrew his hand. Now the hair had merely strayed, and was not lost *from Mrs. Wilson*'s knot, hence the sharp jerk brought a

smothered exclamation and a sudden start from her—a start which sent the detestable copper spinning. Clem caught the coin dexterously with one hand, whilst he turned to offer Mrs. Deans the hair with the other. That worthy woman looked positively apoplectic, and, giving Clem just one look, turned her attention markedly to the preacher. Clem turned, with a fine expression of bewildered disappointment upon his face, replaced the hair on Mrs. Wilson's shoulder and the coin on the ledge, and lost himself in pious meditation.

This occurred some time before this autumn Sunday, but Mrs. Deans had suffered in silence since then. She was prone to leave church with her temper thoroughly on edge. Clem was surpassing himself that day: he wore a long-tailed coat of the fashion of many years before, and, when he arrived, which he did just as the first psalm was announced, he deliberately stood up, and, pulling round first one coat-tail and then the other, emptied them of a multitude of small articles—tobacco, pipes, balls of twine, lead sinkers, little twists of wire, a big jack-knife, stray nails, and a varied assortment of bits of iron and buttons. Having put these all on the seat beside him, he deposited himself with the air of a man who puts aside worldly things to listen to better. Hardly was he seated before he imagined the flies were troubling him. He made several spasmodic slaps at his bald head, and then drawing forth his handkerchief, folded it carefully in four and laid it on the top of his head. Thus adorned, he rose to sing, knelt to pray, and finally listened with reverential attention to the sermon.

> "Few are thy days, and full of woe,
> O man, of woman born;
> Thy doom is written, 'Dust thou art
> And shalt to dust return.'"

So they sang; and the wailing air, upborne by the harsh, untrained voices, reverberated from the bare walls of the church, its jangling cadence pierced by one pure and bell-like voice, for Bing White, with the heart of a vulture, had the voice of a lark.

One passing outside smiled—half amusedly, half sadly—as he heard the singing, and went on his way with the music following him in ever fainter notes, forcing itself upon him.

. . . . . .

On Sunday Myron Holder had her only relaxation. Her grandmother, preserving the prejudices of the little Kentish village from which she had come, detested all other religions save the Episcopal. Her folks had all been strong for Church and State, and she scorned the idea of going to the Methodist church, or, as she contemptuously said, "to chapel." Her vocabulary knew no more derisive epithet than "a Methody." This in itself was enough to isolate the Holders in the midst of a community that regarded Episcopalians as being "next door to out-and-out Catholics," and Catholics as surely doomed. As Mrs. Holder did not go to church herself, neither did she allow Myron to go after the work for the day was done, so she was free to lavish her heart on her child. It was her custom, whilst church was in and the streets empty, to take the boy and go out into the fields or lanes with him, severing herself from the house that had held such agony for her and from the woman whose stinging tongue kept her wound raw. Once with her boy—alone in the air and sunshine—she gave herself up to introspectve soul-searchings. Upon one side she set herself, and upon the other all things good; in the great gulf between there hovered the shade of the man to whom she owed her *misery. In the* abandonment of her self-abasement, she did

not place herself even upon his level, whilst as for little My—he shone amongst the holiest of those things to which it seemed to her she was herself in such direct opposition and contradiction. The great marvel of her life was this child, who owed its existence to her. She looked at it with eyes of adoration—touched it almost humbly, as the Madonna we are told of may have tended the Christ-child on her breast. The child seemed to embody all the dead delight of her own girlhood, to have absorbed all the peace, all the calm, all the gayety she had lost. There seemed no varying moods to cross its baby mind; it was the embodiment of trusting love.

Myron, in the face of this miracle, this perfect blossom which sunned itself in her eyes only and expanded beneath her tenderness, was bewildered and amazed. She began to ponder over the matter, and presently to wonder if there was any phase of the entire situation that made her less blameless—to ask herself in what way she could possibly obliterate shame from her record for his sake.

"Are your garments spotless?
Are they white as snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"

The words came to her as a personal and crushing query as the congregation energetically sang them. Little My clapped his hands and laughed delightedly; the music pleased him. So Myron stood outside until the voices died away, and the murmur of prayer succeeded; then taking My up in her arms, that they might make greater speed, she went rapidly out of the village. She turned to her left, and, going a short distance along the road, lifted My over the fence into Mr. Warner's grass meadow. Through the centre of this field ran a deep ditch, to carry off the surface drainage in spring. Its course was marked by a

thick growth of low-growing shrubs, among which grew short stubby oaks, whilst here and there great graceful elms sprang up in lofty columns, crowned with drooping branches; parasitic vines, sucking the life-juice of the tree they adorned, crept up these elms; their delicate leaves, already scarlet, showed vividly against the gray bark of the trees, and looked like thin streams of blood trickling down. Particularly was this the case where, upon one of the elms, the creeping-vine had reached the point where a branch had been broken off by the wind. The semblance was thus complete: there was the wound —there the blood, and above, the sighing leaves deplored the pain. At the foot of this tree was a huge and brightly green mound, which, as Myron approached, seemed almost artificial, so close were the leaves set, so impenetrably were the tendrils woven together; for this mound was formed of two oak trees over which, completely hiding them, grew a huge wild grape vine, forming a perfect canopy of dense green, and, more honest than the vine that sapped the elm tree, the grapevine, by its luxuriant growth and the vigor of its stem and branches, seemed to proclaim its settled purpose to smother the trees that supported it if possible.

To this Myron bent her footseps. Pressing into the shrubs some distance below, she won her way through them until she came to the foot of the elm tree, and entered the green tent formed by the grapevine. Between the trunks of the two scrubby oaks was a space of heavy green grass, which, springing up before the vine leaves had shut off the sun, kept green and fresh in their shadow through all the heats of summer. Here she and her child sat down; they were completely shielded from observation—the grape garlands at their backs, before *them the masses* of shrubs on the other side of the ditch.

Myron took a biscuit from her pocket and gave it to the boy, and then, clasping her hands about her knees, lost herself in dreams. She had cast aside her sun-bonnet, and the light, with difficulty piercing the shade, shone upon her in pearly lights and gleams—a colder radiance than shone elsewhere.

The soft characterless face of the young girl had been frozen into the enforced calm of passionless despair. Her face gave a strange impression, as of features that would remain unchanged no matter how long time endured for their possessor; as if the voice of pain and shame had bade her life stand still, nor evidence its aging in her countenance. No network of wrinkles, no deep marks of care, could have been half so sad as these youthful outlines veiled by such grief. Her eyes were heavy; her mouth would have been bitter, but that the patience of the face belied all bitterness save that of self-contempt. Underneath this mask of arrested life, vivifying it with tragic meaning and rendering it inexpressibly sad, burned an intense suppressed expectancy, as of one who doth

"Espy
A hope beyond the shadow of a dream."

This lent her face the artistic value of motive, and transformed what might, without it, have been but a sad-faced woman, such as the world holds in countless thousands, into a creature of tragic force.

Myron pondered in the shadow, whilst her child played at her side. It was very still. The child's soft breathing as he plucked at the soft grass was the only sound that broke the listening silence; opposite her was a little maple tree; a single leaf near the top was whirling round and round, caught in some miniature tempest that left unmoved the leaves on either side. In the midst of uni-

versal calm, this lonely leaf was tossed and troubled, singled out for unrest, as Myron Holder had been set apart for pain. But Myron's thoughts were not upon the leaf, albeit she saw it fluttering. She was struggling against a futile wrath, which welled up in her heart and at times nearly mastered reason—a hot rage against herself—*him*—the village. Her cheeks flushed—her hands involuntarily closed.

Why had this lot been meted out to her? In what was she different from these other women whose fault had been no less than hers? Why was continual bitterness her portion whilst they dwelt at ease? Simply because, though tardily, their children had been given a name. She felt a bitter wish spring up within her breast that all those jibing at her were such as she; that all those cruel women might feel the touch of shame; that they might be brought low, and taste the bitter bread that was her portion, and drink the cup they held to her lips. And then she sank into an evil dream. In it she beheld herself sitting in the judgment seat of respectability and meting out judgment to those who so lately had been her judges; for, in her dream, *he* had returned and justified her; she had risen, and all the rest had fallen; and as they toiled along the thorny path her feet had known, she beheld herself pass by on the other side. How she would withdraw from them (her eyes grew cold)! How she would avert her head (her lips were scornful)! How she would look them up and down with contemptuous condemnation, and turn and whisper her verdict into willing ears. That would bring the blood to their cheeks. That would—she paused, arresting her thoughts with a sudden knowledge of their shame; the cold eyes filled with tears, the scornful lips drooped and trembled; she realized the horrible wick*edness of her* own thoughts—thoughts—no hope, she

owned to herself, and crying aloud, "I am wicked, shameless!" she flung herself upon her face in the grass and wept out the bitterness of her soul. The child crept to her side and strove to turn her face toward him; she kept it hidden, but stretched forth her arm and clasped his little form.

My, frightened at the silence with which his overtures were met and at his mother's unusual attitude, and shaken by her sobs, began to cry. Myron roused herself, and taking him in her arms, held him to her breast, rocking back and forth in the abandonment of her grief. The motion soothed and reassured the already drowsy child, and in a few moments he slept, whilst his mother, stilling her sobs that she might not disturb his slumber, bent above him a face wrung by pain.

She mused over her late vision of retaliation. With what cruelty had she hit upon the mode of showing her revenge! Alas, the lesson had been well taught her, for she had known the averted gaze, the scornful lip, the contemptuous regard. She had simply chosen those means from which she herself had suffered most keenly. There came back to her the memory of an early morning, when, standing in the doorway, she had looked out into the dawn and had seen

> "The horizontal sun
> Heave his bright shoulders o'er the edge of the world,"

and had vowed herself to the service of others, and to the atonement of her sin, and hoped for an early death.

Here, under the cold rays of the autumnal sun, and abased before the memory of her late musings, she renewed those vows and scourged her soul with stripes of self-reproach.

When My woke, they went forth from their refuge,

across the fields, up the street to the village; the streets were empty. A shambling figure in the distance, bespeaking Clem Humphries by the length of the coat-tails and the thinness of the legs, was making toward the lake. It was indeed Clem, going to indulge in a little surreptitious sport as an antidote to the sermon. Clem looked upon his churchgoing as one of his many professions, like the making of wire snares and the digging of graves. "Only," he said to himself as he reflected upon the matter, "give me a grave to dig for choice."

Homer Wilson passed the church that day just as they were singing that lugubrious paraphrase. He smiled a little to himself, and went on, saying, "Very cheerful that—very; but they haven't any more idea of returning to dust than I have, at least not for a while." But it seemed he could not get beyond the echo of the singing. The voices followed him far through the rarefied air; there came to him little snatches of the gloomy words, persistently forcing themselves upon him. He quickened his pace, and was soon beyond the farthest-reaching note, and yet it seemed to vibrate in his ears. Once clear of the village, he struck across country.

The sorrel showed red, the ragweed white, between the short stalks of the yellow stubble; here and there in the lanes and by the gateways were spots of bright green verdure, looking unhealthily brilliant among these dull browns and yellows.

This was where the over-ripe grain, falling to earth, had sprung up to wither at the touch of the first frost. Homer frowned a little at this. It bespoke careless management, and the instinct of the farmer was strong in him; but his brow speedily cleared, for his thoughts were of far other things. His walk was very silent; the earth had *indeed "grown* mute of song," and all these resting fields

were dumb; no crisping cricket, no whirring insect, no singing bird, nothing disturbed the serenity of the hour. It seemed a hiatus in the processes of nature—a suspension of all activity, a breathless pause of ecstasy or pain, like the instant before a first kiss or the moment before a final farewell.

Under these conditions thought was easy, and Homer went on and on, his mind dwelling upon the one all-absorbing theme.

"Myron—Myron," he said once, aloud, but his voice seemed at fret with the quietude, and he walked on swiftly, to escape its cheerless echo. Presently he found himself entering the woodland, and knew he was a full ten miles from Jamestown. A straight course through the woodland brought him to the margin of the lake, which bayed in here in a sharp curve.

Close to the margin lay great prostrate logs, whitened by wind and weather till they looked like huge bleached bones. Beyond these were stones and a narrow strip of gravelly beach, broken here and there by boulders, against which the water lapped softly in a thousand ripples, wearing away the rock into tiny cells, and honey-combing them with gentle but resistless touches. Stretching out into the water, a succession of large stones showed their stubborn heads, leading by irregular steps out to where the last one, large enough to be a tiny rocky islet, showed two feet high above the encircling water.

Homer made his way across these perilous stepping-stones, until he reached the largest; sitting down, he sank into a reverie so profound that he scarcely seemed to breathe. His face grew pale as he sat there minute after minute, the water lap-lapping among the rocks, the trees silent behind him, the sky mute above. Once he murmured a few words, paraphrased with no thought of irrev-

erence: "As a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so she opened not her mouth." His voice faltered in what might have been a sob, but was resolutely forced back.

The sun began to fall behind the trees before Homer rose. As he did so, he cast a look at the rock upon which he had been resting; there, caught in a crevice, lay an old-fashioned bullet. He picked it up and looked at it lying in his palm. One could scarcely imagine it speeding through the air upon a hurtful mission. It had wandered on to find a victim, until, its impetus spent, it had fallen ingloriously to lie upon this rock, mocked by the sunlight which it had been meant to darken forever for some living creature. Homer slipped it into his pocket and began to make his way shoreward, leaping lightly from stone to stone. As he sprang to land again, he said between his teeth, "I'd like to hear any she-cat in the crowd open her lips to my wife!" It will be seen his reverie had developed its subject.

Homer held his way home happily, his eyes alight, his face aglow with his old generous spirit. He was once more the Homer of the past. Realizing this, he recognized the debt he owed Myron Holder, and paid homage to that strong soul whose mute endurance of ignominy and betrayal had shamed his own sleeping soul into life. It is plain to us that Myron Holder's shame was Homer Wilson's salvation. It is an ugly thought, but inevitable, that such instances may not be rare. But may not that virtue we hold "too high and good for human nature's daily food"—may not even that be bought too dear? What an ugly complexion it would put upon our intolerant attitude to those fallen ones, if we dreamed for one moment that our immaculate virtue was preserved by their vice! It would be hard to ask us to renounce heaven, but if heaven for one meant hell for another, it were at least well *for us not to* blow the fire.

But Homer Wilson was not thinking of any generalizations; he was simply concerned with the debt he owed Myron Holder and how to pay it; for, and be it told with no thought of disparaging Homer Wilson, he felt he would bestow an inestimable benefit upon Myron Holder by making her his wife. He believed he would, at one blow, free her from the shackles of shame. He never thought of the woman-soul that strove to justify itself by rigid adherence to those vows that had seemed so sacred, uttered, as they were, by lips that were almost divine to the listening heart they had betrayed.

It must be remembered that Homer was nothing but a plain countryman. It was therefore natural that he should look upon himself somewhat in the light of a deliverer when he considered himself in relation to Myron; and yet, inarticulate but existent, there was a hesitancy in his heart, not born of self-conceit or paltry self-seeking, but rooted in the knowledge of his own weakness in time of trial. But he put aside all this; and as he pushed on towards Jamestown mused happily upon the happiness that was his, for he loved Myron Holder. Poor Homer!

> "Whoso encamps
> To take a fancied city of delight,
> Oh, what a wretch is he!"

CHAPTER XIV.

> "For thy life shall fall as a leaf, and be shed as the rain;
> And the veil of thine head shall be grief, and the crown shall be pain."

It was late autumn. The grapes were all cut, although their aroma still filled the air, for stray bunches, superripened by the frost, hung visible now upon the leafless

stems where they had been concealed by the foliage from the cutters. The late apples were all picked, and in the orchards were great piles of new barrels ready to be filled.

Bright green fields checkered the face of the sombre countryside with vivid squares, showing the advance of the fall-sown wheat. The chestnut-burs had opened in the woods, and the hickory-nuts were strewn thick beneath the trees. All the boys in Jamestown had brown-stained fingers, from the shelling of walnuts and butternuts. The Indian corn was being cut and bound into tent-shaped shocks, so that the fields had the appearance of a plain, set thick with tiny wigwams. Now and then, along the roads, a great wagon passed, piled high with apples, windfalls and culls going to the cider mills. Their drivers went out to Ezra Harmon's and loitered about in his big barn where the cider press stood, and watched their apples poured into the wide hopper, heard them grinding and groaning between the wheels, and saw their juices drain out through the clean rye straw into the pails beneath.

People began to talk about the threshing of the grain, to bank up their cellars, and to speak of the portents of a severe winter. The leaves were all down. They lay a foot deep along the roads, where the maples grew in regular avenues, and rustled, wind-blown, between the tree trunks in the woodland. The squirrels skimmed about in their efforts to secure their winter hoard. In the woods, great heaps of hickory-nut hulls and emptied chestnut-burs, showed where, with their sharp teeth and persistent paws, they had removed the superfluous covering before storing away the nuts.

The horses were growing shaggy and the dogs' fur lengthening. In short, winter was drawing near.

In Homer Wilson's orchard all was noise, confusion, and *work*. Homer himself was packing the apples—putting

in a layer of newspapers, then carefully "laying" by hand several rows of apples, before emptying in the pailfuls of picked fruit that were brought to him, for the bottom of a barrel in the orchard is the top of the barrel when it is opened by the dealers. Next in order to Homer was Sam Warner, who was heading the barrels, the tap-tapping of his hammer ringing clear in the frosty air, Homer shouting out directions every now and then in a sepulchral voice from the depths of the barrel. There was a great gathering in the orchard of the neighbors, for a fruit dealer had bought up all the apples in Jamestown to send to England, and they were to be shipped by the car-load upon a certain date. So, following the suggestion of the buyer (to whom time meant money), they had agreed to help each other with the fruit. This was not a usual custom in Jamestown; there was too much jealousy to admit of such interchange of labor.

It was Homer Wilson's benefit this day, and both outside in the orchard and within doors all was happy, hurrying confusion. There was nothing remarkable about the day or the scene; but exactly a year after this, Homer Wilson was to act in a somewhat different scene, and after he played his part in that his neighbors recalled this day "just a year ago." They said, "Who would have thought it?"

Bing White was in the Wilson orchard, and Si Warner, and other of their cronies. No one ever expected Bing to work; his idleness was looked upon with tolerant indifference, a perilous indication in this neighborhood, where to be a hard worker and a good church-goer meant perfection, and to fail in either grace was to be utterly lost. People began to look at Bing White attentively now and then, and shake their heads with ominous import, for *the son and heir* of the Whites was daily becoming

more elfish-looking, more evil-eyed, more mocking of speech, more stubborn of purpose. After racing here and there over the orchard, he climbed (not without scratched hands and torn clothes) into the heart of a juniper tree that grew in the corner, and, hidden there, began to make what was known among school children in Jamestown as a "wolf-bite" upon his arm. This he did simply by baring the arm, putting his lips to the flesh, and sucking at it until the blood showed in red pin-points at every pore; this was a wolf-bite. There was a thread of savagery running through these Jamestown children—hardly one of them but had a mark of this kind upon his arm. But Bing White's meagre arms looked hideously repulsive—like raw flesh almost—so completely was the skin disfigured by his vampire-like amusement. The fading marks were of an ugly unhealthy color, like a livid bruise, the fresh ones fierily encarnadined and inflamed; for Bing pursued this pastime to a perilous pitch.

Another custom indulged in every now and then by the boys and girls in Jamestown was the making of "fox-bites," which meant simply the rubbing with a moistened finger of a spot upon the back of the hand until the skin was worn away and a spot of red flesh left; this was a fox-bite—no cut, burn, or bruise took so long to heal, and in the little schoolhouse there were always some of those hungry-looking sores, attesting the perseverance and fortitude of the sufferers. Rather grewsome pastimes these seem—sprung perhaps from some Indian custom, witnessed by some early settler, described by him to his breathless circle of little ones, by them to be practised in their play and perpetuated in the mysterious manner that makes a meaningless mummery survive as a sacred rite.

Myron Holder's grandmother had been failing during *the entire summer*. She sank rapidly as the autumn

advanced, her strength ebbing as the days shortened. Myron went no more to Mrs. Deans', but stayed at home to wait upon her grandmother. The old woman was a querulous invalid, with no specific disease, only a gradual decline of her vitality. Myron waited upon her untiringly, giving her every possible comfort she could devise out of their scanty means and her scantier knowledge. Bitter as her grandmother's tongue had been, harsh as had been her rule, Myron yet shrunk with a sick feeling of defenselessness from the hour when that tongue would be forever silenced, from the moment when, that rule ceasing, she would be left rudderless.

In these days of autumn quietude, little My grew dearer and dearer to his mother; she caught him to her in the pauses of her work, to kiss him for a moment.

> "O soft knees clinging,
> O tender treadings of soft feet,
> Cheeks warm with little kissings—
> O child, child, what have we made each other?"

This was the translation of her heart's mute cry above her boy. Myron Holder, denied the religion of those about her, given no other in its place, founded for herself a new sect, and created for herself a god, and the god was this yellow-haired child, and the worship she accorded him was expressed in every tender tendance of her loving hand. He chattered away to her ceaselessly when he was awake, and the echo of his uncertain tones mingling with her grandmother's bitter words robbed them of their sting.

Mrs. Holder sank daily. Her tongue was silent now, save for murmurs of discontent or chiding, for her strength did not permit of much speech; but her eyes shone balefully as they followed Myron's figure about the room; and sometimes, when Myron bent over her, their depths were

lighted by malignant mirth, for her thoughts were turned to that little plot in the graveyard where two tiny pine stakes stood now, marking a new boundary.

The day the first snow fell, Mrs. Holder's mind, hitherto fixed solely upon her sorrows and Myron's shame, began to wander. She too, like her dead son, began to speak of England, but not so sweetly as he. Old bits of village scandal, flashes of old spites against this one or that, the expression of old dislikes, broke from her lips with painful force, together with reflections upon household affairs and daily needs, which told that she was in spirit back amid the old manners and the old people.

One day Myron watched her fall asleep, and then crept out to the kitchen to steal a look at the boy, who was also sleeping. She returned in an instant, but in that time a change had come to her grandmother's bewildered brain. She was awake again, and her eyes met Myron's with cruel scorn, as she paused involuntarily upon the threshold of the bedroom; it was an expression that spoke not only of dislike, but loathing, fury, hatred. Myron would have approached to replace the coverlets that were falling from the couch, but her grandmother grew furious if she advanced a step.

"Out of my sight, Myron Kind!" she cried. "Out wi' ye! What? Ye'll follow my son within his own doors, to win him? Out, you! Go—ou—out——"

Myron retreated, seeing her grandmother was confusing her with the memory of her mother. Thrice she tried to enter, and thrice withdrew before the rage that seemed to shake the sick woman's frail form so cruelly. Then, feeling she must have aid, Myron hurried to the street, and going to the nearest house, which happened to be Mrs. Warner's, knocked at the door.

"*Will you* come over?" she said, when Mrs. Warner

answered her knock. "Grandmother's out of her head; she thinks I'm my mother, and won't let me go near her."

"Poor old woman!" said Mrs. Warner, catching at a clean white apron. "Poor old woman! You've made her life a burding to her between you, I'll be bound."

In a few moments they were in the cottage again, and Mrs. Warner installed herself in the sickroom, somewhat disconcerted because Mrs. Holder persisted in calling her "Bet," but delighted that circumstances had brought her to the front at such a time, for Mrs. Warner was one of the matrons of the village who, not yet attained to the elect, like Mrs. Deans, Mrs. White and Mrs. Wilson, was yet far in advance of the young wives in experience, and thought herself quite capable of sustaining any responsibility.

To be present and assisting at the coming of a life or the passing of a soul was the highest excitement and most precious pleasure these women knew; but this was a height to be attained only after many years of wifehood. And what novitiate of suffering experience—years, knowledge—might fitly prepare for these mysteries! The taking up and laying down of the burden, the beginning and the ending of the spinning—for, from our first moments, our hands are bound to the loom; we must weave our own webs, but Fate doles out the thread and Circumstance dyes the fabric, not as we will, but as Destiny designs, and Death spares no pattern, however lovely, but stops the shuttle when our reel of thread is spun.

By what holy purification, by what fastings, by what soul-searchings may we prepare to enter Nature's holy of holies? Surely, ere entering the meanest hut of clay and wattles wherein life springs or withers, we should put the shoes from off our feet.

But of all this Mrs. Warner recked nothing. It was not

the spirit she was interested in, but the body it was casting off; the gasping lips, and not the vital breath that already almost eluded them.

Mrs. Holder sank rapidly. The women began to gather in; Mrs. Warner maintained her place as chiefest in the synagogue, and put aside, with judicial firmness, all hands but her own. Most of the women congregated in the kitchen, where they eyed the scanty furniture and whispered of Myron's hard-heartedness, for she did not weep. She was feeling bitterly her impending loneliness and isolation, for deep down in her heart there yet lived that marvellous tenderness for kith and kin that takes so much to kill. Of a verity, "blood is thicker than water." The woman dying so fast in that inner room was her grandmother, the woman who had borne for her father what she had borne for My. She clasped My in her arms and hid her face in his curls. Mrs. Holder's voice came fitfully through the half-closed door to the women outside. Mrs. Warner came to the door just as Mrs. Deans entered the kitchen, hurrying in from the outer air, and bringing a new excitement with her to intensify the suspense. Mrs. Warner beckoned and whispered:

"She's speaking of hearing music and singing, now; they mostly don't last long after that."

"They," not "we"! Oh, strange race of dying people, that are set apart from all men by death's approach, that we never identify with ourselves! Oh, weird world to which they go, which doubtless we shall never enter! Oh, dreary passage they must tread, upon whose threshold we shall never stand! Oh, awful pang of severance they must endure, which we will never have to bear—and yet

> "Fear not then, Spirit, Death's disrobing hand;
> 'Tis but the voyage of a darksome hour;
> *The transient* gulf—dream of a startling sleep!"

Mrs. Deans and Mrs. Warner entered the room. Mrs. Deans' experienced eye told her how nearly time was ended for the dying woman. She turned to the kitchen.

"You better come in, Myron," she said.

Myron, with her child in her arms, entered, fearful yet of her grandmother denying her; but the old woman's eyes held no knowledge of her presence now. They wandered from one to the other of the throng of women impartially, and then as they fastened upon the child and lightened, as eyes might do which behold long-lost ones once dear, she held out wavering arms to the child.

"Jed, my own little lad," she said.

Myron went swiftly forward and laid My by her grandmother's side. He nestled to her lovingly, and she muttered tender words to him, calling him "Jed" and caressing him with fluttering fingers. He clasped his warm arms about hers, in which the blood was already chilling, and smilingly fell asleep, and a little later sleep came to her also.

It was the night after her grandmother's death, and Myron Holder, with a sinking heart, had watched the form of the last visitor pass out of the gate. The early dusk of winter enveloped the house and promised a long, dreary night—a night of terror she was to endure alone, for the Jamestown women had gone each to her own house and left her with her dead and her child. Her imagination, stored with transmitted superstitions, peopled each familiar corner with horrors. She saw in every flickering light a death fire, in every shadow a shroud; each breath of wind spoke of ghostly visitants, each sound seemed to herald a light. She lit the lamp in the kitchen, and proceeded to undress My and put him in his cradle for the night, pausing to listen between each movement.

She had been anticipating and fearing this ordeal for

days; now that it had come upon her, she sickened at heart.

The definite darkness of night set in, and the child slept. She began to hear soft stirrings succeeded by shuddering silences. Beset by a thousand fears, she pursued the worst possible plan: she constrained herself to absolute inaction, and sat—her hands clasped in her lap—an image of fear. The silence about her gradually gave way to a babel of weird voices, through which there suddenly sounded the muffled pat-patting of light footsteps. As she became conscious of this definite sound, all the imaginary murmurs died, and she found herself in deep silence, broken only by the muffled repetition of the soft sound that chilled her heart. This noise, which she recognized as actually existent, stood out against the background of those imaginary fears with frightful distinctness. All the time of fear which had passed seemed now to have been but an interval of listening for what had come.

At this moment, the flame of the little lamp which had been for some time burning palely suddenly flared up—once —twice; grew for an instant bluish, then went out, leaving her, in the acme of her terror, in darkness. She closed her eyes and listened to the soft sounds—coming now at intervals only, but linked each to each by fear of the last and anticipation of the next, forming a chain that bound her in the Place of Fear. But at last silence fell again, a silence most horrible. She felt impelled to open her eyes, and did so, gazing with wide lids straight into the gloom; there was nothing there. For a moment her heart was reassured: then came the thought of that open door behind her; slowly she turned her head. Does any one live who has not, at one time or other, recognized that it may require, under certain circumstances, *the supremest* effort of will to look behind one?

That effort Myron Holder made, but sustained the gaze but a moment; for, gleaming from the death chamber, nay, from the very couch of death, shone two balls of livid light. With a moan of extreme terror, Myron slid from her chair and, catching at the boy's cradle, fell helpless to the floor.

Homer Wilson did not stand long knocking at the cottage door: his heart misgave him when he saw there was no light. Homer had returned from town late that night; his mother had told him of Mrs. Holder's death. She said no word of Myron, and Homer forebore to question. As he passed his father's and mother's room that night, he heard his mother close the shutters and say:

"It's a mighty spooky night. I wouldn't like to be in Myron Holder's shoes, a-settin' death-watch all alone over a woman I had worried into her grave."

Homer's heart stood still. Could it be possible those women had left Myron alone? Surely not! When it was customary for five or six to go and stay over night in the house where death was? Surely not! And yet—

"The hags!" said Homer to himself, and went down stairs.

He was soon on the road, with a lantern. He recalled the death of his sister, and remembered how the neighbor women had sat whispering together in the brilliantly lighted kitchen, brewing tea for themselves, and now and then stealing on tip-toe to look in upon the silent one.

Arriving at the gate, the darkness of the cottage gave color to all his vague fears of ill to Myron. As he crossed the little garden, slinking cats, drawn by their ghoulish instincts to the house of death, fled before the light, but pausing as he passed, followed to the threshold, their evil breath white in the frosty air, their phosphorescent eyes *gleaming in the dark.*

When he saw Myron, lying prostrate and silent, his first sensation was one of relief. He had feared that she had fled into the desolate night; he realized that she had been frightened and had fainted. Raising her in his arms, he called her name softly. Her senses were already reasserting themselves. She soon stirred, looking up at him with eyes of blank terror, which faded slowly into wonderment as she recognized him. She held her hands up to him, and pressed closer to the shelter of his breast. He caught both her hands in one of his, and groped for a chair with the other. In turning, his eyes caught a vision of the open door of the death chamber. He saw dimly the couch, with its rigid burden, and saw those dreadful glaring eyes. For a moment, he caught his breath. Myron, seeing the direction of his gaze, clung shudderingly to him, and hid her face on his arm. An instant more, and Homer perceived the outline behind those gleaming spots.

"It's a brute of a cat," he said; and Myron, understanding all at once the origin of the sound, broke down in sobs of relief. She caught up the lantern, whilst he went in and seized the bristling creature, crouching upon the corpse, and flung it out among its lurking companions.

"How is it you are in the dark?" asked Homer.

"The lamp went out," she answered. "There's some oil in the cupboard."

He held the lantern, whilst she filled and re-lit the lamp. Then he explained his presence.

"How good you are!" said Myron.

"Good?" he said, his eyes fastening upon her forlorn figure bending over the cradle, for My was stirring.

"Good?" Then he burst forth, "What beasts these women are to leave you alone!"

"It was dreadful," she said, trembling. "The darkness, *the noises, the* loneliness—those eyes, and her!" looking

towards the inner room. Then suddenly she caught his sleeve: "Don't leave me till daylight, will you? Oh, don't! I can't stay alone; I am frightened! I—oh, *don't* leave me, will you?"

"Leave you? Of course not. I wish——," he checked himself abruptly. It was on his tongue to say, "I wish I might never leave you," but a sense of her absolute isolation smote him so keenly that the words stuck in his throat. Had he spoken then, how many things might have been different, for Myron, in her utter loneliness, was ready to cling to any outstretched hand.

"I'm going to make you some tea," he said.

Going to the bedroom door, he closed it, took his lantern out to the little "lean-to" woodshed, and split up some bits of lightwood; with these he roused the dying fire to life. With much precision, he put on the kettle, and when it boiled asked in a matter-of-fact way for the tea.

Myron rose, with My half awake in her arms, and went to the pantry-shelf to get it. It was chill there; she wrapped her apron about My's bare toes. He soon went to sleep again, and Myron Holder and Homer Wilson sat down together to drink the tea. Her eyes rested upon him, as if well content, and he noted this with delight. The truth was they dared not yet stray elsewhere, lest the spectres he had banished might jibber at her from the dusky corners of the room.

Love is served on strange altars, and the sacrifice of a heart was again proffered in that lonely cottage, whose atmosphere was chill with the dreadful influence of death, whose silence was broken by the soft breathing of a child of shame. Homer looked upon the woman of his heart and loved her. When the first breaking of the skies ushered in the dawn, he left.

The *women* returned early, for it was considered an

honorable thing to have the ordering of a funeral—to be able to speak *ex cathedra* of the mode of procedure.

Mr. Muir came. The last ghastly toilet for the grave was made. Nothing remained but to wait for the morrow, when the funeral was to be.

The women looked at her curiously when they came that morning, and Mrs. Warner expressed the sentiment of the rest when she said: "That Myron Holder is bad clean through. Any other woman would have been drove crazy last night; but look at her! She's a hardened one!" Mrs. Warner did not consider that this speech cast any reflection upon herself and her friends who had subjected a woman to an ordeal calculated to drive her crazy.

Night sank slowly down; and once more the women, departing, cast wondering glances at Myron's pale face, steadfast in the knowledge that she would have some one near her to chase those horrid visions away.

When Homer arrived, she was sitting beside her sleeping child, sewing upon an old black skirt of her grandmother's that some of the women, with an eye to funeral effects, had pinned up to suit her shorter stature, and bade her sew, that she might be properly clothed on the morrow. The work was nearly done, and the needle hung loosely between her listless fingers. Her eyes ached for lack of sleep; every joint trembled from fatigue; every nerve tingled from overstrain.

She greeted Homer more by a gesture than by speech, and perceiving her exhaustion, he insisted upon her resting. She made some demur, but he overruled it with a word. She rose a little unsteadily, and bent over My.

"Where do you want him taken?" asked Homer, and lifted him in his arms.

She led the way to the little bedroom off the kitchen, opposite to the one in which her grandmother lay.

Homer laid My down upon the blue and white checked counterpane—spun in England by Myron's mother.

"Good-night!" he said. "Good-night, Myron!"

"Good-night!" she answered in almost a whisper, for she was inexpressibly weary. Almost before he had reached the next room, she had sunk down upon her bed.

It was broad daylight when Myron awoke and rose, chilled and stiff. Utter weariness had overcome the discomfort of her cramped position; she had slept as she had first thrown herself down; she shivered. as one does who has slept in his clothes. The morning air was cold, and the window-panes glistened with frost.

Hurrying out to the kitchen, she found Homer had done what he could for her comfort before leaving. The stove held a glowing mass of hardwood embers; evidently the fire had been well banked up before he stole away at dawn. The kettle stood singing on the stove; the table was drawn up by the fire, and awkwardly set out with dishes for her solitary breakfast.

. . . . . .

The hour of the funeral was at hand.

Mr. Muir, determined to have nothing to blame himself for in regard to his bargain, had come dressed in his official broadcloth. His horses stood outside the gate in all the panoply of sable plumes and black fly-netting, the latter surely superfluous, but ornamental. These horses looked as if they had never appeared before a less stately equipage than a hearse, yet every one had seen them pass that very morning dragging an unpainted lumber-wagon. They looked as if they had never known a baser burden than "stained cherry with mahogany finish, plated handles and bevelled glass," yet an unplaned pine box had constituted their load that morning; and as they passed, each on-looker had said to the *other*, "*There* goes old Mrs. Holder's shell."

"Who's Myron Holder goin' with?" said Gamaliel Deans to his mother, as they drove along to the village the day of Mrs. Holder's funeral.

"I don't know," answered his mother. "Mrs. Warner's took a mighty lot to do with everything, so like's not she'll take her."

"Seems to me Mrs. Warner's been putting herself forward some," suggested Gamaliel, diplomatically.

"Indeed she has," agreed Mrs. Deans; "enough sight more'n she's got any call for—considerin' all things."

They passed the little graveyard, silent beneath the light snow.

"Is there any track?" asked Mrs. Deans, looking across the white expanse, with her hands shielding her rheumy eyes.

"Yes," said Gamaliel, "the shell was took out this morning; you can see it from here." He gazed interestedly across to where the corner of an unpainted pine box showed as the terminus of an ugly black track which the wheels of Mr. Muir's wagon had scarred upon the snow.

They drove on without further speech. The first snow had fallen in the night. It lay now white and untrodden, over field and lane, over bush and tree, over house and barn. The air seemed spaced in vistas of cloudy whiteness, a purity which suffused itself in the atmosphere, and seemed to fill it with particles of impalpable white dust that the motionless air held in suspension. The trees glistened in the sun, whose rays were silver instead of gold. All the world was rimed with hoar frost—nature presented, in beautiful parable, the story of the iron hand in the velvet glove; for, despite the whiteness, the softness, and the silvery sun, it was intensely cold.

Presently through this white world there wended the *gloomy little* funeral, the more gloomy for the lack of any

real grief. They reached the graveyard, where gaped an ugly brown gash, beside which the earth lay in frozen clods.

Mr. Prew's brief prayer was ended, and he departed, stamping his feet. There was the bustle as the coffin was lowered; then, one by one, the onlookers straggled away; one by one the vehicles departed, until Myron Holder was left alone by the grave—yet not wholly so, for My shivered in her arms, and old Clem Humphries was hastily pushing the earth atop the coffin. And presently Myron became aware that there was another patient one also, for Homer Wilson came to her side, carrying a buffalo robe in his arms. He laid it down on the frozen ground, and, taking her arm, drew her gently towards it. She looked mute thanks to him from eyes round which the slow tears lingered, rimming them with grief. He came nearer and held out his arms to My, but the child cowered closer to his mother, and looked at Homer from the vantage of her shoulder.

The little group embodied all the stages in life's progression. There was the child, cowering in a world already cold to him. There was the woman, bearing in her countenance the ineffaceable traces of woman's agony. There was the young man, strong in the choice of will and heart; the old man, drawing the last coverlet over the last sleep; and, severed from these by only a short depth of kindred substance, she who had passed, her bed rapidly rounding to a grave.

At last, Clem began patting the mound with the back of his spade; his work was nearly done. Each echoless blow struck upon Myron's heart; and, thinking of the shame she had wrought the dead woman, she dealt herself those blows that she had been accustomed to endure from her grandmother's bitterness.

Homer broke the silence, which seemed deepened instead of lightened by the thud-thud of the spade.

"Come, Myron," he said; "you better go home."

"Yes," she answered, heavily, "I may as well;" and she turned to the footpath that led across the graveyard to the road.

"Not that way," said Homer; "the horses are here."

"The horses!" she said; "the horses! Is your mother waitin' for me?"

"No," he answered, a little grimly. "No, she isn't; but I am, and the horses are."

He recalled the stormy little scene his mother had made but a little while ago: her contemptuous words when he asked her to wait; the scornful and bitter accusation she had flung at him; it had leaped forth from her lips like an arrow held long at the bowstring. It was barbed with all the poison of accumulated suspicion, and winged by the impulse of unreasoning anger, such as springs within mean breasts against hands that succor them; but it had reacted swiftly upon herself, for at the words something came into her son's eyes not good to see—a blending of surprise, indignation, denial, that paled his face, and made it implacable. Before it Mrs. Wilson faltered in her tirade, wavered in her steps, and finally turned and, crossing quickly to where Gamaliel was waiting for his mother, was soon seated with Mrs. Deans in the back seat. Gamaliel backed his horses slowly out of the throng, and they drove away.

The incident had not been unnoticed, but no comment had been made, although meaning looks, of which Homer now knew the interpretation, were exchanged. He had seen some such looks pass between his neighbors of late. A hot, impotent rage filled his heart against the false position in *which he was* placed, but it did not alter his determination.

"Are you waiting for anything, Homer?" Mr. Warner could not refrain from calling out before starting.

"Yes. What of it?" said Homer, turning round sharply. His brows were knit, his lips firm; an interrogation, not defiant, but direct, was expressed in every line of face and figure. "Yes," he said again, and unmistakable interrogation this time made the answer a question.

Mr. Warner shook the reins hastily over his horses.

"Oh, nothing—nothing," he said, "I was only wondering."

Homer turned away abruptly. "Better keep his wonderment to himself," he muttered, with a frown. "They better all keep their amazement to themselves or——" his hand clinched in a very suggestive fashion. Then he had gone for the buffalo robe for Myron to stand on, and as he gazed at her forlorn figure his anger changed to deep and abiding pity, to stern and righteous wrath. So Homer drove Myron home to the empty cottage, with Clem Humphries sitting in the bottom of the wagon, with his feet dangling over the tailboard, a quid of tobacco in his mouth, peace within his bosom. Clem was, as he expressed it, "a dollar to the good," and he was meditating unctuously upon the quantity of good Canadian Rye he could buy with the money, and speculating where he could beg, borrow, or (be it admitted) steal a jug. He had no mind to pay for one out of the dollar.

Mr. Prew, the minister, passed. He regarded Homer and Myron with incredulous horror, and returned Homer's somewhat brusque greeting in a very scandalized way. Clem took off his hat with a labored flourish; Mr. Prew returned his salute with condescending affability, and drove on to Mrs. Deans', where, presently, over hot soda-biscuits, doughnuts, and other good things, he praised Clem as "an humble, but very worthy old man."

"Humbugging old hypocrite!" ejaculated the "worthy old man," as soon as his pastor was out of hearing. "Miserable, designing old cuss he is. I'd like to use him for bait!" Then this humble follower relapsed into his reverie upon the *modus operandi* of getting a jug.

No other words were uttered during the ride. Homer and Myron were both silent; both knew that Homer had flung down the gauntlet to the gossips; both realized the import of the step; both pondered upon its significance from the village point of view.

Clem jumped off nimbly when they were opposite Mr. Muir's verdant veranda.

"You are not angry with me, Myron?" asked Homer.

"Oh, no," she cried; "you are so good to me."

"I'm good to you for my own sake," he answered. "Don't you see that? Don't you suppose I am looking out for my own happiness?" He paused. "Don't you think I am?" he resumed, an insistent note in his voice.

They were near the cottage, but she felt obliged to answer.

"But, Homer," she said, "I have no happiness to give any one! What return can I make for this sacrifice?"

They were opposite the cottage. Clustered heads in the window of the Warner house showed how their return had been waited for; Homer discerned the white muslin rose in his mother's black bonnet, and if the sight made his face hard, it softened the touch of his hands as he lifted Myron down from the high seat, and then put the boy in her arms.

The little gate stood leaning against the fence. It had been lifted off its hinges, to leave free room for the coffin and its bearers to pass. Myron paused between the gate-posts; Homer bent above her.

"I will tell you some day," he said, "what you can give me."

"I WILL TELL YOU SOME DAY WHAT YOU CAN GIVE ME."

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"Good-by," she said; and, turning, passed down the desolate garden, feeling remorseful that she had left him unthanked.

Homer, now that the tenderness evoked by her presence was left unsustained, felt a spiteful defiance waken in his heart. He walked slowly to his horses' heads, pretending to adjust the harness; then, after inspecting them with critical deliberateness, drove slowly past the curious eyes at the window.

"Might as well give them the full benefit of the sight," he said to himself; "it seems to strike them as interesting."

All day long, as he swung his axe in the woodland, he mused upon Myron as he had seen her last, with pure, uplifted brow and chin, as she said good-by.

He returned at night, calm, and braced, as he thought, to receive a storm of reproaches. He found a table "coldly furnished forth" for his supper; the kitchen was deserted, and from his mother's room came the hum of voices.

Mrs. Wilson expected to crush her son utterly by this isolation, but it was a treatment he could endure much longer than she could suffer to inflict it, for to women of her type the expression of anger in words is essential; any repression of speech is a physical pang. It was well, though, for this one night that it should be so, for Homer's calm was but as the brittle crust that forms on seething lava, that neither controls nor cools it; that melts at a touch, and offers no restraint to the force beneath. Too hot an anger yet filled his heart to admit of peaceful argument; his hand was too ready to clinch yet when he thought of Warner's tentative question. He ate his supper, smoked a peaceful pipe, and soon slept, dreaming, even as he had done all day, of the calm sweetness of those *patient* eyes.

Myron was having her first of solitude, passing it in brief watches of wakefulness and shorter spaces of sleep.

And in the lonely little graveyard a new-made mound was slowly whitening under the falling snow.

CHAPTER XV.

"This above all—to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

"Though Allah and Earth pardon Sin, remaineth forever Remorse."

WINTER lay white over the land—a bitter winter. The road, beaten to a glassy whiteness, glistened between unbroken plains of dull, lustreless white, for the fences were hidden by the heaviest snowfall ever known in Jamestown. The cold was intense; for twenty days the icicles had hung unmelted in the sun. The crows, tamed by hunger, flapped their sluggish wings over the barnyards. Here and there in the fields a black blotch showed where one of them had fallen, half-starved, half-frozen.

The foxes, grown bold amid the silence, came to pillage the henroosts in broad daylight. The rabbits, traced by their uneven tracks in the snow, were easy game; numbed by the cold, they were quickly overtaken. The sparrows clustered close together in the barns, winning their way in at every cranny.

The last year of Jed Holder's life, he had one day run into the cottage, excitedly calling to Myron and his mother to "Come out and see the sparrow—a real little English *sparrow,* a regular old-fashioned little spadger." Tears *ran over his thin,* browned face as he watched it upon the

sharp ridge of the cottage roof. He could not cut his wood that day for listening to the familiar fluttering of its wings as it flitted hither and thither in the cottage garden, pushing its way inquisitively into the thickest branches of the privet bushes and bustling out indignantly when it found nothing there worthy of its impertinent scrutiny.

It eyed Jed with much friendliness. Two English exiles indeed these were—banished from the red-tiled cottages, the hop orchards, the old meadows, the sunken lanes, the hawthorns, the hollies; but in a few days there came another fluttering sparrow, and resemblance ceased between Jed and the important, bustling bird, busy now in building the nest. Ere the summer was gone there was a chattering little flight of them to swoop down among the placid hens and snatch the grain from their very mouths.

Now these birds were regarded by the farmers as a pest, and an overzealous government offered a bounty for their little feathered heads. Clem Humphries proved himself a valiant hunter of this puny prey. He boiled barley and then drew a stiff bristle through each grain. The sparrows ate and died, and Clem drank their blood-money.

But they still flourished. The cats waged war against them, and many a palpitant little breast was torn by their pointed teeth. The old Maltese cat at Deans' had perpetually a downy feather sticking to his cruel mouth, and his strong paws were ever stained with red. An ugly brute he was: half of one ear was gone; from the other, hung a tiny blue wool tassel fastened through a hole like an earring; his nose was always scarred and torn, and of his tail only an inch or two survived the teeth of the dogs with which he had waged war.

He lay in wait for the sparrows by the hour at the doorstep of the henhouse, and with depressed back and evil

eye stole between the fowls as they pecked at the grain; then came a pounce, the hens flounced about hysterically, and the cat, with his captive, came out to sit in the wood-shed and devour it at his leisure. The first time he caught a bird, he had tried to torment it after the tender manner of his kind; but at the first toss with his paws the terrified bird had soared far beyond his most vaulting ambition. But, alas, evil minds learn wisdom soon. It was long since then, and now he always gave them short shrift.

It was a bitter winter. The horses and cows were covered with exceptionally long hair, and the dogs were shaggy as bears. The hens straggled about with bleeding, frozen combs; the yellow feet of the ducks were white from frostbites; the turkeys' wings drooped dejectedly, and many died; the geese were disconsolate, their white plumage soiled and unsightly, for there was no water for them to bathe in.

The snowbirds twittered cheerily for a short space at noontide, but vanished as the day waned. Only where any crumbs or grain might be likely to fall, their tiny footprints were woven in delicate tracery on the snow.

The gulls flew over the village, until, their wings wearied, they turned them again to the lake, to rest upon a cake of ice. A long rest it proved to many, for their feet froze to the ice, and they uttered their hoarse cries as they strove in vain to rise.

It was a bitter winter. Every pond in Jamestown was frozen solid to the bottom. All day long there were slow processions of cattle passing to and from the lake.

The pumps were all frozen, and a great boiler stood on every kitchen stove, melting snow for household uses. The rats swarmed in the houses and the barns. Each person *had tales* to tell of frozen noses, frostbitten ears,

numbed fingers, aching feet. Mrs. Wilson brewed "yarbs" and drank them all day long. Henry Deans grew stiffer and stiffer, and seemed shrunk to a mere shell. Bing White had already killed enough sparrows to buy him a pair of skates.

But in the midst of all the winter's white desolation, there glowed the hearth fires of home. Used to the cold, these hardy farmer folk defied it; and if they might not brave its blasts, stayed warm and close indoors.

There were tea-meetings and socials, temperance meetings and the half-yearly revivals, shooting matches with poultry as the prize, and raffles for turkeys. Then there was the threshing to be done, and the pig-killing, and next summer's fuel to cut in the woods.

The women sewed carpet-rags, patched quilts, and knitted mittens and heavy socks of homemade yarn. It was a terrible winter, and it was going hard with Myron Holder.

She had to endure all the rigors of the cold, all the solitude of shame, all the privations of poverty, all the terrors of night's loneliness, all the anxieties of motherhood, all the regrets of remorse, all the hopelessness of dead Hope, all the apprehensions of want: this in a solitary cottage, creaking at every blast, shivering in every wind, swaying in every storm.

Think of it, you holy women, who fare delicately, sleeping on soft couches, guarded and consoled, caressed and kept from all evil! For you are like Myron Holder in one thing: Not in suffering, nor shame, nor sorrow; not perhaps in humbleness of heart, nor meekness of spirit, nor in courage, in patience, in faithfulness, nor in hopelessness; not in poverty, nor in endurance; but with her you share, despite yourselves, a common womanhood. Remember that!

Remember also she bore upon her brow the marks of motherhood's crown of thorns. Remember who with tears washed Jesus' feet, and do not forget to whom, we are told, He said, "Neither do I condemn thee."

Homer Wilson, in defiance of his mother, public opinion, and Myron's own objections, had taken her ample wood for the winter. Old Mr. Carroll had given her a supply of flour and a ham, and hired her to clean up his house and whitewash his kitchen walls against the New Year.

She milked Mrs. Warner's cows at night and morn, receiving for this service a small can of milk daily. This was for My. No drop softened the harsh mullein tea she drank herself. Her life was inexpressibly desolate. The wind whistling over the cottage brought her the loneliness of the lost. Sometimes for days she saw no one to speak to, and, worse than all, she began to lack the necessaries of life. Flour means much, so does a ham; but for a woman and a young child more is needed. My began to look white, and at times his face had that expression we called "peaked."

Seeing this, Myron took a resolution. It cost her much, for her grandmother had often spoken of the disgrace of "going on the parish," as she put it; but the sight of My's face was too much for his mother, and she resolved to apply to the council for township aid.

It was a bitter day's cold when she came to this resolution. Pile the wood as high as she might in the stove, she could not banish the rime from the windows. The latch of the door stuck to her fingers every time she opened it. A tiny slanting rift of snow lay in the little bedroom, where it had crept in through the badly jointed windows.

It was Saturday. On Saturday nights the youths of *Jamestown* went courting. As twilight deepened into

night, she heard the frequent jingle of sleigh-bells. They tingled through her heart and awakened a new loneliness in her breast. She sat always in the dark now, for oil cost money. She had but a lampful in the house, and that must be kept in case of emergency. The light from the hearth of the wood fire shot forth dusky little flashes into the darkness of the room. These feeble shafts were not strong enough to banish the hosts of shadows, but they so far prevailed as to leave them lurking in the corners of the room only. But there they held silent carnival—mocking at the lonely woman sitting silent within the wavering circle of the feeble light, stretching out impalpable arms to embrace her, extending icy fingers to touch her, waving their draperies over her head, and always biding their time, until weariness should drive her to her bed; then they sallied forth in their strength, and danced and gestured about her until sleep closed her eyes to fears.

My slept upon her knees. The sound of the latest sleigh-bells dying away left the silence seeming still more profound, as a momentary light intensifies the succeeding darkness. She heard footsteps crunching on the snow; then a knock.

"Come in," she said.

Despite herself, she felt a momentary hope flicker in her heart.

The door opened and, entering, Homer said:

"It's me, Myron; Homer Wilson."

So faint had been her hope that she scarce felt a sting in relinquishing it.

"Yes," she said. "Wait until I light the lamp."

She did so, and Homer came forward into the light, his broad shoulders seeming to fill the room as he stood, clad in a rough frieze coat that enveloped him from shoulder

to heel. He took it off silently, laid it over the chair she had placed for him, and, going at once to her side, put his hands upon her shoulders.

"Well, Myron," he said, "do you remember asking what you could do to repay me for what I had done?"

"Yes," she said, knowing that her time of trial had come.

"Then," he said, bending over her, his face flushing, his tones vibrant, "I can tell you in a moment." He paused, to steady his voice. "Will you marry me, Myron?"

There was a moment of breathless suspense—an instant of absolute silence.

"No," she said, firmly enough; but her hands closed tremblingly upon his sleeve.

"Myron!" he ejaculated. "Myron! You do not mean it! Why—I love you, Myron!" he broke forth, with passion; "I will have you! Do you think I would be bad to you? Do you think I would be unkind to the boy? I can't stand to see you live like this!" He glanced at the bare room, which suddenly seemed to show all its gaunt corners, all its angles, all the scantiness of its meagre comforts. It was the very skeleton of a home.

"Myron!" He stopped—she was looking at him with words upon her lips.

"Listen," she said. "Do not be angry with me, but tell me one thing: Would you ask Suse Weaver to marry you, or Jenny Church, or Eliza Disney?"

"Why, Myron, they're married already," said he, in a maze.

"So am I," said Myron, throwing back her head so that her eyes met his, whilst the color flooded her face, giving it a dangerous and triumphant charm. "So am I. When he bade me be silent, he bade me be true. He swore that *he would be.* He explained to me how little the *saying* of

marriage vows meant. He said it was the keeping of them that made the marriage. I have kept them. I believed his promise under the sky, whilst we were alone, was as true and binding as mine when I said I would be silent and do all he wished me to; and he taught me to see that in this twofold faith lay the real marriage, and not in words spoken before people. He told me the stars were truer witnesses than men. That heaven was nearer there, among the trees, than in the churches; and it did seem near—so near I almost entered in. I believed we were married as sacredly as though Mr. Prew had married us. Believing that, I gave myself to him. He has been false to his promise, but I will never be to mine. I thought myself married then. I will hold myself in marriage bonds until he comes—or death. For the rest, let him look to it!"

As she had spoken, Homer's face changed with her changing words, but the resignation of her last words inspired no calm in him; it woke instead a fierce resentment. He was to lose her. She was to continue to suffer the old ignominy; the village was still to have its victim—and all for a brute who had deliberately deluded and deserted her. Homer's next speech began with an impatient oath, but half stifled.

"Myron," he said, his tones so determined as to be almost harsh, "have you not realized yet how false his promises were? How wrong his persuasions? How utterly false and untrue all this fine talk about the 'stars as witnesses' and 'heaven being near' was? The stars are very convenient witnesses for curs of his stamp, being silent in face of any perjury. Do you not see the pit he prepared for you? Do you not fall, pierced by the stakes at the bottom? Do you not see that his promises are all lies? Can you not understand, then, that the rest of his

twaddle was no better? Why will you continue to bind yourself with a wisp of straw? Your hands are free—give them to me!"

"I realize all—I see everything," she cried, "and feel—God! what have I not felt? But—oh, Homer, don't you see how it is? I could not kiss my child—I could not endure to see my own face as I bend over the well, if I thought of another man. Don't you see I would then be vile?"

"No, I don't," said Homer. "Marry me—you and *the boy* will have my name, and let me hear man or woman say one word against it!"

"I can't," she said.

"Marry me," he urged. "Let me take care of you. Let me show you what a man is. Let me give you a heart and a home. You are lonely, you will be lonely no more; defenseless, I will protect you; sad, I will make you happy; shamed, I will compel them to respect you. Myron"—he held out his arms—"marry me!"

Myron Holder had thought of this hour ever since the day of her grandmother's funeral. Her thoughts had all been of his pain. She had never realized how it might mean almost intolerable temptation to herself.

The contrast between the picture his words presented and her own life was poignant. She stayed a moment, gazing at that brighter scene, then put it by and turned herself to the reality that she had accepted as her bounden duty.

The sense of sacrifice with which she did this showed her how strong was the sorcery of the thought.

"No," she said.

"Myron," said Homer, paling, "don't you understand? I will take My as *my own*. I will give him a name in very truth. I—for My's sake, Myron!"

It was the supreme temptation. In a moment Myron

saw what it meant, the materialization of her evil dream in the meadow—the stilling of the scandal that else must attach itself forever to My; the ending of all her own shame and solitude, or as much of it, at least, as appeared to other's eyes. But sorrow and shame teach subtle truths; etched clear upon the metal of this woman's soul, burned deep upon the tablets of her heart, their acids had graven the symbols of their teachings. Myron had battled against many fears, and knew, with the absolute certainty of conviction, that after the first triumph there would come a bitter reaction. She knew she would be forever at war with her own conscience. She knew that life held no prize high enough to pay for infidelity. There came suddenly athwart the dreary room the mirage of another scene: A wide stretch of sky and water, blended in a far-off blue, a mass of tossing tree-tops, a scent of fresh green ferns and flowering grasses, a swimming sense of light, exhilaration, freedom. . . . Homer was speaking. She did not hear his words; his voice was but an *obligato* to other tones that struck across it. She paid no more heed to Homer's voice than she had done that day to the rustle of the leaves, the whispering of the water far below. . . .

"Trust me," a voice was saying in her ear. "Trust me, I will never leave you; believe me, I will never fail you. Why do you distrust me? You do not love me. Do you not understand this is the real church, more holy than any building made with hands. Do you not understand it is the mutual faith makes marriage, and not mere maundering words? Don't you? . . . So long as you are true to me, you are in very truth my wife?" . . . The voice ceased there, it had said enough.

The sky, the water, the tree-tops, and the fresh fragrance of the woodland weeds passed in an instant; but they had *left behind* an unfaltering resolution.

"No," she said; and so brief a time had sufficed for that retrospective vision that Homer did not remark any delay in her reply. Only his heart shrank, for something in her tone bespoke the finality of her decision.

The disappointment was cruel. He dropped into a chair and buried his face in his hands. She knelt before him, and pulling his hands from his face clasped them close against her breast. She looked up into his face from eyes that spoke of tears held back by bitterness.

"You understand, Homer?" she said. "If I cannot justify myself in my own eyes, I shall go mad. To do so, I must indeed remain as I am. I must act as though I were in very truth his wife. What does a wife do for her husband? Give up all? Have not I? Suffer? I have suffered. Obey him? I have obeyed him. Be true to him? I have chosen him before myself. Trust him? I have. I have trusted and waited. I will wait to the end."

She ceased.

Homer's eyes left her face, to look about the desolate room. The wood fire was dying for lack of attention, and the air was growing colder.

"But how am I to make it easier for you?" he asked, at length.

"You can't make it easier for me," she said. "'I have made my own bed,' as grandmother often said, and must lie on it. I went against the world's ways, and I suppose it's only right now to expect the world to be against me. No one can help me but *him*."

"Who is he, Myron?" asked Homer; and she saw a sly, venomous look light his eyes.

"Homer!" she said, her voice holding reproach and interrogation.

"*Yes, I* would," he said. "I would kill him as readily

as I would set my heel on a snake. *Widows* marry!" There was an ugly emphasis on the word, an emphasis that held unconsciously somewhat of the derision of a sneer. But the sneer was turned against his own impotence.

"You are frightening me," said Myron, and the words brought him to himself.

He rose, drawing her to her feet beside him. "You are right, of course, Myron," he said. "But—this is the second time I have loved—you remember the girl I brought to the farm one day? Well, I loved her. She and I were to have been married, but I had to come back to the farm, and she changed her mind. Since then I have been a fool—worse, indeed. I have set aside everything for the sake of money. I was fast getting to be such another as old Haines or Jacob Latshem—all pocket and no heart. But I saw your courage, and it made me think shame of myself. You saved me—I thought to save you. It would seem as if I had offered you another shame. You know how little I care what people say of you! Poor girl, they can't say worse than they have done. So, will you let me do what I can to make things better for you? You know I have plenty. Will you let me be your friend, to help you, comfort you, and to see you and talk with you, as friend does with friend?"

"Dare you?" she asked.

"Try me," he answered.

She held out her hand. He took it. It trembled in his grasp.

"To think," she said, "of my having a friend!" The smile that lit her face transfigured it.

Homer put from him the desire that swelled within his heart to take her in his arms, and began to talk of her position.

"You can't go on like this," he said.

"If it was only summer," sighed Myron.

"I'll tell you what," he went on, after a moment. "Clem Humphries and Ann Lemon have both applied for help to the township. They'll have to be boarded somewhere. Supposing I get them sent to you to board. The township would allow something for yourself also." Then he added, hastily, "Won't you let me give you enough to put you through the winter? Do, Myron."

"No," she said, answering his last proposition first, "but I would be so glad if they'd let me work for Clem and Ann."

"Well, I'll see about it," said Homer.

A day or two after that, the council, of which Homer was a member, met, and the applications of Ann Lemon and Clem Humphries were laid before them. Homer rose and made a formal proposition on the lines which he had suggested to Myron. It was carried at once. Mr. White was the other Jamestown member of the council, and he was much more concerned about getting home to take his cattle to the lake to water them than about anything else. He made no objection, and the other members of the council had matters relative to their own districts that they were anxious to have considered. The council meetings were open to every one, and the school-house was crowded with village people. Homer observed the looks that passed from one to another, and could not beat back the blood that reddened his swarthy cheeks as he put the formal motion before the council "on behalf of one Myron Holder."

"What about the kid? Don't it need any allowance?" a voice said in the corner of the room, and another answered, "Oh, Homer'll attend to that." A roar of *laughter followed*. Homer grew white enough when he

heard this, and turned a look toward the corner whence the voices had come that made the group occupying it stir and shift about uneasily and start fragmentary conversations among themselves, as if to disarm that bitter look and disavow the speech that provoked it.

In this group Homer discerned Gamaliel Deans and Lou Disney, the latter the bully of the county. Lou and Gamaliel had been running together all winter, and rumor spoke not very flatteringly of their errands.

The meeting dragged along wearisomely to an end, and the men thronged out from the close, warm schoolroom, where the air was heavy with the fumes of tobacco and reeking with the moisture evaporating from the coats hung against the wall, for it had been snowing when the meeting began.

Night was just beginning to fall. It had ceased to snow, and the air was keen with intense frost, that crackled under foot and squeaked beneath the runners of the sleighs.

There was much stretching and talking and laughing as they went out, and Homer, among the first, heard his own name uttered, followed by a laugh. Then he heard Lou Disney's voice in a disjointed sentence—

"Pretty cheeky, that! First"—Homer lost the words here—"and then ask the council to keep 'em."

Homer turned in an instant, flinging himself through the crowd with the relentless impetus of fury. He swept the throng aside regardless of any obstacle, and seized Lou Disney's throat whilst the words still lingered on his lips, choking in that first fierce grasp the laugh that gurgled up to echo its own wit.

In a silence that appalled the crowd, used at such a time to much speech and few blows, Homer tore him from the door, to which, with the instinct of a fighter, he had put

his back. Pressing him backward through the throng, Homer loosed him, with a curse, when fairly outside the straggling group.

"Now," said Homer, "eat your words, Disney, this minute—every lying syllable of them—or I'll thrash the soul out of you!"

Disney was no coward. The words had not left Homer's lips before he was tearing off his coat. The next moment they rushed at each other.

The fight was so fierce, so furious, so short, that few there could afterwards tell the story of it. Disney was the bigger man, and quite as clever with his hands as Homer; but the latter's arm was nerved by every insult Myron Holder had endured. As Disney sprang forward, he uttered her name, coupled with an epithet that simply maddened Homer. There was no resisting the fury of his attack. . . . Many hands dragged Homer from the man he had knocked insensible and bade fair to kill, if left alone.

He stood trembling, a great bruise darkening on his face, showing where Disney's first savage blow, aimed at the jaw, had fallen. Presently Gamaliel drove Lou off in his cutter, and the throng melted away. Clem Humphries lifted Homer's coat and brought it to him. The old sinner's face glowed with excitement and gratification.

"You punched him well and he needed it bad," said he. "Never seen a man suffering for a licking more'n Lou Disney was; and he got the cure for his complaint without asking twice, he did. There's something," he went on, keeping pace with Homer, as the latter began to move away, "there's something so satisfying in seeing a man get what he wants, and get it like that, too, and—you should have seen Male Deans' eyes, sticking out like door-knobs, *the boiled idiot*!"

CLEM LIFTED HOMER'S COAT AND BROUGHT IT TO HIM.

Clem paused in disgust, then went on again: "Why didn't you lick him, too? That would have been uncommon satisfactory!"

"There, said Homer hastily, "shut up, Clem! I'm going home." Whereupon he lengthened his stride and set forward at a pace which left Clem far behind, to make his way towards the other end of the village, with much complacency. His wicked old heart was full of pleasure. He had danced from one foot to the other, howling out a stream of encouragement and curses during the progress of the brief fight; had protested vigorously against the hands that pulled Homer from Disney, and had pushed Gamaliel Deans forward with all his might in Homer's way, hoping to enjoy a continuance of the battle. Failing this, he had gone along behind Disney and Gamaliel for some distance, reviling them as they drove off, until, remembering his religious principles, he had arrested himself in the delivery of a choice gibe, to slink behind the school-house corner until the crowd was gone.

"He woke up the wrong dog that time," chuckled Clem, thinking of Lou Disney, "and got bit."

Clem had a bitter grudge against Gamaliel Deans and every one connected with him. The day of old Mrs. Holder's funeral Clem had searched over all the barns he knew, in the hope of finding an empty jug that he could take to get his dollar's worth of whiskey in. But luck was against him. The cider-jars that had figured at the last threshings had seemingly all been carried away. He was quite disconsolate when, in the late afternoon, he returned to Mr. Muir's. He had hardly arrived there before Mrs. Muir sent him on an errand to Mrs. Deans. Having dispatched his message, Clem sought the barn, and the first thing his eyes lit upon was a fat and capacious brown jug. Gamaliel was in the barn mending harness,

and to Clem's request replied that he might take it, adding that it was used at the last threshing.

Clem returned to the village late, partook of the somewhat meagre supper Mrs. Muir tendered him, and, going out at once, got his jug, rinsed it at the pump, and with it under his arm, trudged off to town to get it filled.

Now, unfortunately for Clem, it had not contained cider, but black oil, for the threshing machine. There was a thick coating of the oil within it, but the cold had fastened it stiff to the sides, and Clem's somewhat perfunctory wash with the icy water from the pump did not remove it. All unconscious of this, Clem proceeded upon his errand, got his whiskey, and started for Jamestown.

Manfully he resisted the temptation to take a drink. Clem knew his own weakness and the strength of his appetite when whetted by a taste. He hugged the jug close to him and trudged on. At length he reached Jamestown, and ensconced himself in the hay in Mr. Muir's stable-loft. But the alcohol had acted very differently from the water. It had completely dissolved the oil and incorporated it with itself. Clem's first long mouthful was his last.

The mixture was atrocious. Clem cursed till he exhausted himself, arose and broke the jug into the smallest fragments, and ever after hated Gamaliel Deans with a holy hatred, being firmly convinced that he had been intentionally tricked. Thus it was that Clem's delight was so genuine as he made his way to Mr. Muir's barn, where for the present his headquarters were. He entered, and, with a view to a supper of snacks from Mrs. Muir, proceeded to attend to the wants of the two black horses and the piebald mare, stopping to slap his brown old hands on his thin legs every now and then, ejaculating, "The boiled idiot!"—a pet expression of Clem's, not inexpressive of *mental softness.*

Clem moved about stiffly, and it was some time before he sought Mrs. Muir's kitchen door, his knobby old hands stiffened and glazed from holding the handle of the hay-fork. But not only had Clem accomplished his tasks in the barn, but eaten his supper, warmed himself and crawled off to his bed in the hay before Homer Wilson arrested his headlong walk. He had gone far beyond his farm—far, far beyond the farthest light of Jamestown. But at last, his strength leaving him suddenly, he paused and, reeling, turned towards home. It took him hours to retrace his steps.

The late dawn of the next wintry day fell upon Homer as he had flung himself down upon his bed, fully dressed, and with shining drops drying upon the livid bruise that disfigured his face.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Piteous my rhyme is
What while I muse of love and pain,
Of love misspent, of love in vain,
Of love that is not loved again;
And is this all, then?
As long as time is,
Love loveth. Time is but a span,
The dalliance space of dying man;
And is this all immortals can?
The gain was small, then.

"Love loves *forever;*
And finds a sort of joy in pain,
And gives with naught to take again,
And loves too well to end in vain;
Is the gain small, then?
Love laughs at 'never,'
Outlives our life, exceeds the span
Appointed to mere mortal man:
All which love is, and does, and can,
Is all in all, then."

THE talk that grew out of the fight at the school-house, the scandal that succeeded the talk, the gossip that spread the scandal, occupied the attention of the whole village for weeks, and the darkest shade possible was cast upon Homer's share of the affair. Every one felt it a species of self-justification to rail at Homer and excuse Disney, who had a devoted following among the young men of his own age and calibre. His manner was more fortunate than Homer's, though his intentions were far from being so generous.

Certain mental preoccupations had kept Homer somewhat apart from the men of his own age in the district—

first, his ambitious dreams of a course at the commercial college, which led him to try to keep up his studies during the long summers when he was kept out of school to work; then came his absence in the city, when all his knowledge of the village filtered from the unready pen of his mother.

Upon his return to the farm his eyes were yet blinded by the glamour of *her* hair, so that he found it sweeter to lie upon the grass, with his hands beneath his head, gazing up at the skies and thinking of her, than to join in any of the young people's enjoyments. He saw her eyes in every star, her hair in every moonbeam, her form in every graceful cloud. He felt her breath in every zephyr, he heard her voice in the rippling of the leaves, her laugh in the babble of the brook or the lapping of the lake.

Enchanted thus with his own imaginings, he made no effort to grasp the swiftly slipping cable of sympathy with his fellows. When his visions were dispelled and desecrated by her infidelity, well—he had made one or two futile snatches at the vanishing strand that had bound his heart and interests to those of his old school friends. But either it sped too fast from him, or he strove to grasp it too rudely, for he withdrew his hands from the task and found himself loath to make an effort in that direction again. This piteous outreaching for sympathy that is withdrawn sears the soul deeply, even as sliding ropes sear the hands; and yet we must not shrink from the life-line that is to save us from the flames. We must endure the hurt to escape the greater peril. And it is better to live, even with torn and bleeding palms, than to shrivel in agonizing flames or suffocate in smothering smoke.

Withdrawn from temptation, Homer did not go forth to seek it, for he was nauseated of all desire. Thus there was no danger of his soul consuming in the evil fire of his own passions. But how nearly he had succumbed to the

miasmatic exhalation that rose from the Slough of Despond into which his faculties had sunk! Now, indeed, he was winning his way out.

> "Men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things."

But it is a painful progress, for each stone must be won from the strong edifice erected by ourselves to bar our way, of which each block is a passion, a sin or a folly, cemented together by selfishness and self-indulgence, based upon self-pity, garrisoned by prideful spirits that mock at our efforts. Driven from the ramparts, they throng about our feet to jostle us from our hard-won stepping-stones.

The Sir Galahads of life are much to be admired, and yet shall we not crown those also, who, having fallen, have again found firm footing—those strong souls, overcome once, that have struggled through all this and at last sprung to shore? Let us hope, at least, that they find those long-sought shores flowerful and pleasant.

Alas! Homer Wilson looked but upon a barren prospect, waste and drear, disappointing as the alkali lakes that mock the wanderer dying of thirst in the desert. Therefore it was not much wonder that he grew sad-faced and silent.

Had the woman he loved been happy, his life would not have been wholly desolate, for his love was of that unselfish type that desires rather the happiness of its beloved than its own gratification. But from Myron's desolate heart-fires there could come no joyful radiance. The only light her life diffused across his path was a pale glimmer of dying hope, that illumined the sorrows of their separate ways. Myron was indeed relieved from the pressure of actual *want, for Clem* Humphries and Ann Lemon were domi-

ciled with her; but of comfort or peace of heart she had none.

Neither Clem nor Ann had ever been compelled before to seek township aid, and, with the perversity of human nature, they agreed in associating Myron with their downfall, and persisted in regarding her as being in some way responsible for it. They both were devoted to stimulants—Clem's choice being whiskey, Ann's gin. When the monthly instalments of money from the council arrived, they both, with one accord, set to work to wheedle some of it from Myron, with a view of gratifying their spirituous desires. In this, however, they were entirely balked. Beneath Myron's meekness and patience an iron will was strengthening.

Homer had said: "Don't give either of them any money. I'll give Clem tobacco when he needs it, but don't you begin giving them the money, or there'll be no stop to it."

That was enough. No persuasion moved Myron after that, either to yielding or to anger.

"She be a fair devil for obstinateness," said Clem upon one of these occasions.

"Yes," agreed Ann, venomously, "and who be *she* to lord it over the likes of us? *We're* decent, if we be poor."

It was, however, only upon these occasions that Clem and Ann agreed at all. They quarrelled continually, taunting each other with a fondness for liquor, and each making mock of the hypocrisy the other displayed in going to church, much upon the principle of one negro calling another a "black nigger."

The remarks they indulged in were, to say the least, personal, and each displayed a fiendish aptitude for finding out the weak spots in the other's armor.

Ann still cherished the shreds and patches of youthful vanities, mouldy remnants of adornment with which she

disfigured herself on high days and holidays. She had a little house in the village, and a lot with some plum trees upon it. In summer she made shift to live very comfortably, what with the plums, and her chickens, and odd days' work. Indeed, she might easily have saved sufficient to keep her during the winter, but Ann was not of those who "go to the ant," and, after due consideration of her ways, become wise.

Her habit was, when she had a few dollars by her, to adorn herself with her best, go to town in the mail-wagon, get as much gin as she could for the money, and then give herself over to the enjoyment of her purchase. Upon these days it was no small excitement for the Jamestown children to watch the going and returning of Mr. Warner and his mail-wagon.

Long before mail-time Ann might be seen arranging her finery. She wore a black merino skirt, draggled into a tattered fringe at the bottom, and stained here and there by the drops that fell more swiftly as Ann's hand grew less steady. By some chance, she had once bought some bright blue ribbon from a peddler. She put two rows of this round her black skirt. Unfortunately the ribbon proved too short for the two rows, so that in the second one there was a hiatus of some twelve inches between the ends of the ribbon. This to some people might have been a somewhat insurmountable difficulty, but not to Ann. Catching her skirt just at that point where the ribbon failed to connect, she raised it gracefully with one hand, displaying the edge of a red flannel petticoat and a goodly length of robust limb. It is not recorded that she was ever seen so drunk as to forget herself sufficiently to loose her hold of the skirt, although upon several occasions she was carried helpless into her house, laid upon her bed, and *left, as the good* Samaritans of Jamestown expressed it, to

"sober up and be ashamed of herself." Her bodice was only an ordinary calico one, but she covered its deficiencies by a black cashmere tippet of antiquated shape and ample size. It had a tassel between the shoulders, and certain lonely sparkles here and there showed that in the days of its youth and beauty it had been be-bugled. At the neck of this she pinned a knot of faded magenta ribbon, fastening it with a shell pin.

But the crowning glory of Ann's holiday toilet was her "front." This "front" was the only bit of false hair in Jamestown, and was regarded as an unholy thing, a direct manifestation of "the Devil and his works." Mrs. Deans always declared that Mrs. Wilson had "as good as owned up" that she would like a similar front; and indeed Mrs. Wilson, good woman, had been moved almost to defiance of public opinion by the evil fascinations of that sinful scrap of tousled hair. As a matter of fact, Ann's "front" was somewhat the worse for wear; the parting was a parting indeed, and several curls being gone at one side, there was a bare spot, where the black-net foundation showed. But Ann's bleared eyes looked out right jauntily from beneath this lopsided coiffure.

Perched upon her head was a bonnet. Originally covered with red silk, it had grown glossy and dark from much wear. Upon one side of it was stuck grotesquely a shapeless knot of black crape—limp, rusty, soiled by mud and weather, yet a symbol still of the loss of husband and child, and of a deeper loss than this—the loss of hope, the loss of self-respect, the loss of self-control, and the triumph of an evil appetite.

For long ago Ann had had a husband and a bonny daughter, and she herself was a big, buxom woman, fresh-colored and wholesome. But her husband died, and the daughter was carried home dead to her one day, with the

water that had drowned her dripping from her long hair and leaving a dotted line upon the floor as it ran from the hand that hung over the edge of the rude bier.

Ann never "picked up" after that. Despite the admonitions of her Christian neighbors and their warnings against sinful repining, she yet dwelt ever upon her loss, seeking oblivion when she could in drink. Well, she was wrong, of course, but "the heart knoweth its own bitterness," and in the empty niches of her heart there perhaps lurked the shadow of an excuse for her.

In a certain old neckerchief, mottled with gay colors and bordered with purple, were tied a few tawdry relics, a string of black wooden beads, a knot of discolored blue ribbon that had clung to a tress of the drowned girl's hair, a dark pipe with the tobacco still in it, a waistcoat barred with bright stripes of yellow, a heavy plated watchguard—these were all that remained to Ann of the joy of life, and yet upon them fell as bitter tears as ever dimmed a diamond-set portrait or a pearl-clasped lock of hair.

This woman, for whose coming husband and child had once watched, was now an amusing spectacle for Jamestown boys. As Mr. Warner drove along the street Ann would go out and await his coming in all the dignity of conscious grandeur. She never started for town until she had enough to pay for her ride there and back, besides the money for her gin, for, as she often said, she wasn't much of a hand at walking.

Before getting into the mail-wagon, which was simply an ordinary two-seated light wagon, with a flat canopy upheld at the corners by iron rods, she paid Mr. Warner fifty cents, which was the fare to town and back. Then she mounted to the back seat, where she sat enthroned, her feet upon the canvas mailbag.

She enjoyed the drive thoroughly, nodding with much

affability to every one they met, irrespective of whether she knew them or not, and saying, "Poor crittur! Who be he, I wonder. He don't know me," when any one failed to return her salute.

At the door of the Post-Office Ann got out, having paid no heed to the gingerly hints Mr. Warner had given her about getting out when they came to the town limits.

"Wouldn't you like to stretch a bit, Mrs. Lemon, before we get into town?" he would say, tentatively.

"No, I ain't a mite stiffened up to-day," she would reply.

"Because I'll stop and let you out if you'd rather," Mr. Warner continued.

"Oh, I wouldn't put you to no trouble," Ann demurred, politely.

"It wouldn't be no trouble," he would feebly protest.

But Ann only said: "I'm all right, Mr. Warner. No rheumatics in my knees, thank Providence and red flannels! I can sit, walk, or ride with the best of them yet." Then, animated by sudden concern for him: "But look here, if you're crippled up, jest get out and walk alongside and I'll drive. Do now, just reach the reins acrost here. I can drive as straight as a string."

But this ordering of affairs was still less to his liking; so, resigning himself to the inevitable and comforting himself with the thought of the fifty cents, he drove on to the Post-Office.

Here Ann alighted, and then began making inquiries as to the precise time of leaving, which side of the street he would be on, whether any one else was going, besides many other details that suggested themselves to her as legitimate excuses for prolonging the conversation, during which she surveyed Warner haughtily. Finally she sailed off, with a last imperative injunction "to be punkshul."

When she returned, she was usually pretty far gone. She rolled in her walk, and fiery glances shot from her eyes. The tippet was usually screwed around, so that the tassel depended like an epaulet upon one shoulder, and the magenta ribbon did duty upon the other. Her bonnet had a trick, that amounted to a habit, of cocking itself hilariously over one ear, and the "front" usually pointed straight at the other.

Mr. Warner took care always to be ready to leave when she came. He had a painful recollection of a day when he loitered about the Post-Office longer than usual, and came out at length, mailbag over his shoulders, to find Ann the centre of an admiring group that applauded her whilst she gave a full, particular (and, be it whispered, true) account of the Warner family history.

In every little village there are certain stock stories that are told about certain families. If it be a scandal-monging little hole, the stories usually have a tang to them.

The tales about the Warner family were particularly spicy ones, the men being notoriously cruel to their horses and "close-fisted" in their dealings. Some of the women were not all they ought to be, and the whole family connection so penurious as to be but one remove from misers.

Ann was giving a veritable epic illustrative of each of these family failings, and had just got to the point bearing upon their cruelty to their horses.

"The bones of the horses the Warners killed stopped up the drains in Jamestown." Turning, she whipped up the bit of felt saddle-cloth under the harness of the mail-wagon horse, and showed the galled patch on its back; then she drew attention to the raw places on the shoulders that Warner had smeared with black wagon-grease, to render *them less* noticeable. Warner was furious, and would

right gladly have left her there, but he did not know how far her tongue had taken her or how far it could go, and he felt it safer to insist upon her getting into the wagon.

Then her mood changed. She insisted he was her best and only friend, embraced him from behind with one arm round his neck until she nearly strangled him, whilst she strove to give him a drink from her black bottle with the other; wept because she could not climb over into the front seat beside him, and finally subsided into maudlin tears of repentance and retrospect, mingled with pious ejaculations of thanks for the comfort she had that day received.

Warned by this experience, Warner was always ready, waiting for her when she appeared, and had acquired some skill in persuading her to mount into the wagon immediately upon her arrival. Her untimely demonstrations of affection, however, were never to be guarded against, and his flesh crept upon his bones until he was clear of the town and out into the country. It was decidedly a trial to have Ann for a passenger, only there was one saving mercy about it—afterward Warner had fifty cents more. To the Warner mind that meant a great deal.

It was a popular saying in Jamestown that "a Warner would take a kicking for a quarter any day."

Without these occasional exhilarations Ann grew morose and vindictive. She glowered at My as he played about the floor, gave Myron a myriad pin-pointed stings anent his existence, saying, with pious unction, that whatever little she had to be thankful for, she never should cease being grateful that she was *decent*, and relieved the tension upon her feelings by an active and aggressive warfare against Clem.

Clem returned her complimentary attentions in kind, and exhausted his ingenuity in planning to torment Ann.

There were several battles royal between the two that marked the history of their warfare, as great victories star a campaign. There was the evening, when they all sat round the little table drawn up close to the fire, and Clem, nodding his head with drowsy satisfaction, took the first morsel of a plug of chewing tobacco Homer had given him. Clem half-closed his eyes and gave himself up to its enjoyment. Myron rose softly, to carry the sleeping baby to bed. Ann's eyes wandered malignantly from Clem's contented countenance to the plug of tobacco (so near her hand), and from thence all round the room. She looked longingly at the fire, but shook her head; discovery would be too prompt. Her eyes fell upon a tub of water, set close to the fire to prevent its freezing against the morrow. Her face lighted—an evil inspiration had come to her.

Slowly—slowly—she put forth her hand. Clem's eyelids wavered—she withdrew it swiftly—there was a pause. Again her itching fingers approached the square of tobacco —again were withdrawn before a flicker of those eyes. Another breath—then carefully, stealthily, she grabbed the tobacco, withdrew her hand, and, bending far over, slid her prize into the tub of water.

Then, to all appearance, sleep suddenly overpowered her. Her head began to nod, her eyes to close, she breathed heavily, and her relaxed hand fell limply by her side.

Clem rose presently to build a new fire, and, being extravagantly inclined because of his plentitude of tobacco, ejected his "chew" into the ashes, and, after putting on the wood, returned to his seat and put out his hand for his tobacco.

Myron entered at that moment from the bedroom. The fire crackled as it caught the new fuel; old Ann sat like a *nodding mandarin*, oblivious (outwardly) of everything.

Clem's astonishment at its disappearance was great. Nevertheless he did not grow wrathful until he had turned out his many pockets and bestrewn the table with their varied contents. He banged each article viciously upon the table, but Ann still slept. She was somewhat overdoing her rôle, and Clem's smouldering wrath flamed up into active indignation as she sat there calm amidst the storm.

"Get up!" he said. "Get up, you stovepipe, and let me see if it ain't under your chair? You know something about it, I'll swear you do! If 'twas a glass of gin, I'll warrant you'd scent it out! Get up, will you?" Saying this, he jerked her chair aside by the back, so that Ann, who was feigning all the languor of one suddenly aroused from deep sleep, slid off the chair to the floor. She improved the occasion, however, by knocking the chair over on Clem's corns as she rose. Clem gave a frightful oath, and Ann stood erect, with a jeering laugh. Myron, anxious to preserve peace, joined Clem in his hunt, whilst Ann stood by.

"Call me stovepipe, will you?" she asked. "Stovepipe indeed, and me the best figger of a woman in the village in my time! Stovepipe! With my waist, too! Stovepipe indeed!" An indignant snort rounded off her sentence.

The little kitchen was so bare that any search was either easy or hopeless. Myron and Clem searched and searched, going over and over the same ground, as the wisest of us do when we look for something lost—for pleasure in old pain, for joy in bygone voices, for hope in withered joys.

Ann waxed more and more derisive.

"If 'twas a spoonful of whiskey, now," she began, plagiarizing and paraphrasing his own words to her; "if 'twas a spoonful *of whiskey* now, I'll go bail you'd nose it out.

You'd ha' run ag'in it long ago. You're better at getting whiskey than at getting clean jugs to put it in, though."

Clem turned to glare at her, and stubbed his toes against the tub. He cast his eyes down, with a curse, but his gaze was held by something which, even as he looked, sank to the bottom, thoroughly saturated.

In a moment he had it out—his tobacco, bloated out of all semblance to its dark-brown self. One glance was enough. With accurate aim, he flung it with all his might at Ann's triumphant countenance.

It struck her across the lips, parted for another gibe. She subsided, sputtering, and Clem, gathering up his belongings from the table with one sweep into his handkerchief, flung himself out of the room.

Myron's life was passed in a continual jar and fret because of these quarrels. She strove to interpose herself as much as possible between them, for Ann's malice grew more and more venomous, and Clem's dislike threatened to break bounds, and from speech become blows. Ann was persistent in her demands for "somethin' warmin'," and do what she could Myron could not satisfy them.

But their bitter words did not sting as her grandmother's had done. Love has a strong potency in pain and pleasure.

There is poison upon the tongue of a friend when it turns against us. No dart pricks so deep as one launched by a hand we love. Gall and wormwood are mingled in the draught when the bitter cup is pressed to our lips by the hand that has tended us in childhood. No thorns are so sharp set to pierce our feet as those implanted in our path by one we love.

Some years ago there was a marvellous tale told of a *woman in* the mountains of Africa, wondrous old and *beautiful, and* exceeding wise. We are told that by the

touch of her finger-tip *She* blanched a snowy streak athwart a girl's dark locks. Later, with another malignant gesture, she reft the girl of life, so that she fell dead in an instant.

Myron Holder's soul was being blanched by the pointing fingers of her world. Would they stop there? Or would the cruel allegory be completed? Would those merciless mockers not cease until, deprived of life and hope, Myron Holder faltered and fell to what they pictured her? For there was every chance she might.

Her face had gained a pale and—inapplicable as the word seems—lofty beauty. Her eyes held within their depths the secret of all pain, and the storehouses of such knowledge are often more beautiful than those that garner gayer truths. Her lips, softened by the love of her child, were warm and red; his kisses kept them so amid the pallor of her face, like a little hearth in a waste of snow. So small and sweet the mouth was, so tremulous, so shrinking, it seemed the pallor of cheek and chin encroached upon it daily. It did not seem a mouth for speech: there was but space for sobs and kisses, and yet—it had had kisses, and kisses leave strange savors sometimes, and it had parted in many a sob. Who, then, could tell if the pressure of those lips brought pain or pleasure? And what man but would dare all to know?

Behind her lids lay love, too, gleaming through the veil of her sorrows, as the reflected sun shines from a well. At present it was all for her child—later?

Nowadays, when on every side they talk so much of the force of "suggestion," it almost makes us wonder if our fellows' lives are not a reflex of our conception of them—if a consensus of opinion that a person is guilty does not tend to make him what we assume him to be.

It would seem the Jamestown people did the best they could to aid the devil, whom they professed to sacrifice,

when, with the pointed forks of malice, they thrust Myron Holder forward to his fires. Each time Homer Wilson came to sit in the cottage his heart ached more and more for this woman. Against the background of Ann's slovenly form and Clem's squalid coarseness she shone like a jewel in a rough clasp. Each time he departed the wrench was greater, but he could not deny himself the pleasure of seeing her. As for her, his visits were the only alleviation of her life, his visits and My. For the child was beginning to talk now, and pattered after her every step. She had taught him a meaningless baby jingle—"Mama's My," she said; "My's mama," answered My—and when he got to know it well, he would chatter it out in swift alternation with her, until the simple words, expressive of the absolute inviolate bond that united them, pierced her soul with a sense of their isolation, and she caught him to her as of old Hagar may have pressed Ishmael to her dishonored bosom.

But out of Homer's visits fresh spite and scandal sprung. For old Ann, denied money for gin, grew bitter and revengeful, and took to going from kitchen to kitchen with the song of her sorrows. Finding her welcome and entertainment proportioned exactly to the amount of news she had to tell, she did her best, like a good laborer, to be worthy of her hire.

Every incident of Myron's life was noted and enhanced by Ann's evil imaginings—was bruited from lip to lip. Myron knew this. In the old days, whatever bitterness had awaited her within the walls of the cottage, they had at least shielded her from the curious eye and whispering lip of the village. They did so no longer. Her last refuge was taken from her. She felt she lived in a veritable glass house, pierced by day and night by relentless eyes. The *knowledge* made her restless and ill at ease.

Ann did her best, as has been said, to deserve the welcome she received at Mrs. Dean's, Mrs. White's, Mrs. Warner's, and the other houses she went to. She crawled up from her warm couch to listen at Myron's door at night, and crept back, shivering with cold, and angry that Myron did not justify the vileness of her suspicions.

The "long glories of the winter moon" sent shafts of pale light to illumine both the sleepers and the listener. Within the chamber were the two shamed ones—the sinful mother, the child of sin. The two faces close together, both calm—for one heart was ignorant of the world and its cruelty, and the other for a brief space oblivious. Two hands were hidden, close clasped, beneath the coverlet; two lay palms up, so that the moonshine lit them palely—the one pink-palmed, unscarred, unstained; the other so worn, so hard, having lifted such heavy loads and borne such bitter burdens, having been stung by flowers that change to undying nettles, having so often shielded shamed eyes, having so often pressed against a breaking heart, having so often been raised in fruitless supplication, so often wrung in despair.

Without the door the listener, tremulous with eagerness, leant, holding her breath, and longing for the confirmation of her evil thoughts. She caught only the cadence of the breathing of mother and child—a music sweet to the old gods long ago, they say, and sacred still to us, the incense of love's devotion and sacrifice of suffering.

And is the offering less sacred because ascending from an altar differing in shape from the law's design? In what strange quality were these commingling breaths lacking that they should rise in vain?

Love bestows upon many things its own immortality. Why not upon the air, that gives it life? The air that has been breathed by the mutual lips of love can never again

commingle with the grosser ether of our earthly atmosphere. It ascends afar, and perchance shall form the winey atmosphere of that fabled Land of Compensation, where, we are told, "the crooked shall be made straight."

CHAPTER XVII.

"All the secret of the spring
Moved in the chambers of the blood."

"Lovely spring
A brief sweet thing,
Is swift on the wing."

QUEEN ELEANOR— ". . . Some
Flowers, they say, if one pluck deep enough,
Bleed as you gather."
BOUCHARD—"That means love, I think.
You gather it, and there's the blood at root."

WINTER was softening to spring. It was the dismal transition period, when half-frozen mud and icy slush take the place of snow. The deep drifts of the winter were gone; only in the fence-corners there yet remained darkened icy ridges, showing their outline.

The fields were bare, but the discolored snow still lay in patches on the roads, where it had been beaten hard. The world never looks so desolate and disreputable as at this time, when the earth, looking up inquiringly to a comfortless sun, pleads—or so it would seem—for heat, that its nakedness may be clothed with verdure.

The tree-tops in the woodlands clashed together, and the blows seemed to start the sap within them, for their buds began to swell, and all along their branches the satiny *receptacles*, wherein were coiled the first leaves, glistened.

The sugar maples sparkled night and morning with tiny icicles, where the sweet sap that oozed out at noon froze in the colder breath of evening. Every schoolboy in Jamestown had swollen lips from eating these icicles—dainty morsels they were, too, their flavor the very essence of sweetness.

All the trees in the forest seemed to stand at "attention," awaiting the command of the sun to leap to life. Only the low-growing witch-hazel, that uncanny tree, associated with the Black Art from time immemorial, had taken upon itself to bedeck its limbs with fuzzy little yellow and brown tufts of bloom.

But none of the other trees followed its example. They waited the heat of the sun. From all accounts, the root of the witch-hazel seeks less celestial fires to draw its life from. At any rate, this overwise tree knows all subterranean secrets, all the wonders of the water, all the wind's weird whisperings. Passed along the surface of the earth, does it not divine where, far beneath, the hidden springs gush forth? Launched upon the water, does it not stop and tremble where the drowned one lies? Before the coming of the storm, do its leaves not dance, and nod, and rustle, though moved by no perceptible influence save the intoxication of their own evil sap? Besides, what magical mysteries, what eerie orgies, does it not share with hairs from black cats' tails, and moss from gravestones, and teeth of dead people? Ugh! It is no wonder that its deep, deep roots know where to seek for warmth.

The moss upon the rocks that faced the lake front was vividly green. Last year's dead leaves had rotted beneath the snows, and the empty seed-vessels of the tall weeds served as bells for the jesting wind.

Whatever suggestions of bygone beauty, whatever anticipations of *unborn* flowers lurked in the woods, the village

at this time looked depressingly squalid. Relying upon the snow's charity in covering a multitude of sins, the untidy housekeepers had imposed upon it. Now they were shamed. The melting snow left exposed all the débris of the winter. Heaps of tea-leaves cast forth by careless hands beside the doors, ashes flung out hastily, bones, broken crockery, and the heads of decapitated chickens bestrewed the streets.

Outwardly, at least, Jamestown had been quite a decent village before the snow melted; now, it showed like a hypocrite from whom the robe has been torn away.

With the first break in the winter weather, the men began to "go over" the fences, rebuilding those the snow had broken, replacing the rails and boards that the wind had torn off, and sinking new posts where the frosts had heaved the old ones out of the earth.

Clem Humphries had long been impatient to leave Myron's and get out of the reach of Ann's irritating tongue, and his eager search for work got the reward of being hired by Mr. White to bore post-holes.

He stuck to his task until he earned a few dollars; then his long-saved thirst drove him to town. The money went for the old purpose, and Clem got gloriously drunk. A sudden brief but biting spring frost setting in, he was found next morning in Mr. White's barnyard, lying by the strawstack, his fingers clasping rigidly an empty bottle, his long boots frozen to his feet.

They carried him in beside the kitchen stove, cut off his boots, and by noon old Clem was as sprightly as ever; only he cursed sulphurously when he saw the wreck they had made of his foot-gear. This was particularly annoying to him, because he knew that had he "only had sense enough, he could have got a good quart more of rye for them very *boots they cut* up, as if they weren't worth a cent."

Many men might have suffered from this experience, but alcohol has great preservative qualities and old Clem's system was saturated with it.

Clem being now "off the township" and exposed to all the inclemencies of Fortune's variable winds, it behooved him to supply himself with a new suit of religion, as the snake takes to himself a new skin. This he did. He spoke piously of his failings, his experiences, his backslidings and beliefs, so that Mrs. White held him in godly commiseration, as one sore beset by the enemy.

So Clem fed and fattened, whined diligently, and worked as little as he could help, and laughed in his sleeve at them all.

Mrs. Deans said to Homer Wilson, with sneering emphasis:

"If you *should* see that Myron Holder, Homer, I wish you'd tell her I want to speak to her."

"Very well," said Homer, unmoved.

"Will you be likely to see her?" pursued Mrs. Deans.

"Yes," said Homer, in a matter-of-course tone. "Oh, yes, of course I'll see her."

"Still, after all," Mrs. Deans hesitated with a fine show of prayerful reflection, "maybe I hadn't ought to ask you to call there? There's no use making things worse than they are, and I'd never forgive myself if I thought I put you in the way of wrongdoing."

"I don't understand," said Homer, calmly. "Is there anything wrong about your message?"

"Not about my message," answered Mrs. Deans; "but, after all that's come and gone, I dare say you would not like to go to the Holder place. Well, I don't know as I blame you. It's terrible discouragin' to be mixed up with such a story; but there, never mind, I can send Maley. No one would think anything of his going."

"Make your mind easy, Mrs. Deans," said Homer, contemptuously. "Ann Lemon, I am sure, has let you know that I am in the habit of going to Myron's as often as she'll let me. I'll be very glad of your message as an excuse to go again."

With this Homer departed, leaving Mrs. Deans as nearly dumbstruck as it was possible for her to be.

That afternoon Myron stood knocking at Mrs. Deans' kitchen-door, holding My by the hand, whilst he struggled to get away to the collie dog which lay on the porch, its front paws crossed in an attitude of dignified leisure.

From the poultry-yard came the mingled babble of the fowls' cries. A thin blue banner of smoke uncoiled in a long spiral from behind the house. It diffused an aroma of herbs and withered grass: the rakings of the garden were being burned. Gamaliel and the hired men were opening a ditch in the field next the house. Their coarse voices and coarser laughing came clearly through the spring air. A sparrow flew down and, laden with a long straw, flew up again to the woodshed eaves, where its mate proceeded to help it to weave the straw into the walls of their nest. The old cat, thinner now than in the winter, looked up at their toiling malignantly. Every now and then the eye was conscious of a dark speck above the line of direct vision, as the swallows soared in long sweeps over the building.

The sky was bright, but not very warm; and when one of the many floating clouds interposed a veil betwixt its rays and the earth, there came a quick sense of chill. The men's voices grew higher and more confused. Then, clear above the murmur that they made, came shrill whistles and shouts of "Bob! Bob!" The collie sprang up, and, throwing dignity to the wind, wriggled between the *boards of* the garden fence and darted across the field, to

enjoy presently a hilarious chase after a pair of water-rats that the men had found in the stopped up drain.

It was a spring day—all delicate sunshine and shimmering shadow, all soft with tints of mother-o'-pearl, with hints of after-heats and breaths of bygone bitterness. Above floated "the wind-stirred robe of roseate gray," and beneath the earth lay murmurous, sentient, expectant, and eager; with little streams finding their way to the lake, each seeming the bearer of sweeter secrets than we know.

> "O water, thou that wanderest, whispering,
> Thou keep'st thy counsel to the last!
> What spell upon thy bosom should Love cast,
> His message thence to wring?"

A spring day—yet somewhat sad, and strange with the uncertainty of unfulfilled dreams. It was but one minor note in Nature's glad interlude between "winter's rains and ruins" and summer's languorous perfections, fleeting to the eye, elusive to the memory, but lingering long in the heart.

Myron knocked and waited. Presently Liz opened the door. She had a knife in one hand, a potato in the other, and her fingers were stained a deep brown. Liz was cutting seed-potatoes, and even as she walked back to her place by the window, dexterously sliced the potato she held into angled bits, preserving in each an eye for growth to spring from. Mrs. Deans came, and when Myron left she had arranged for another summer's toil under her benign influence.

Mrs. Deans had decided to raise poultry more extensively than ever this year, and, berate Myron as she might, she recognized fully how valuable her faithful services were. Mrs. Deans proposed that My should be left with Ann

Lemon during the day, but Myron said humbly but very decidedly that the child must come with her. Mrs. Deans demurred, but read Myron's pale determination aright, and finally consented. It gave her an excuse, however, for still further reducing the meagre pay she had given Myron the summer before.

Myron had been prepared for this, and did not grumble when Mrs. Deans named the lower wage, whereat Mrs. Deans was wroth with herself that she had not said still less.

Ann Lemon went back to her own house, and Myron once more went back and forth to the village. The winter had changed her. She no longer shrank from before the gaze of those cold eyes that met hers daily. Instead, she met their glances with firm lips and unmoved eye, not boldly, not appealingly, but with an acceptance of rebuke and scorn that was stronger in its endurance than wrath, with a patience more pathetic than any appeal.

No smile ever moved her lips, no anger ever raised her voice. If tears ever dimmed her eyes, they were unseen. If any ray of hope yet flickered within her breast, it was well hidden; its fires never flushed her cheeks nor troubled her eyes, and those humble eyes were "deeper than the depth of waters stilled at even."

The spring advanced. Each evening whispered of a new beauty, each night saw the birth of a new mystery, each morning revealed it in nature's mirror, each day bespoke some completion of beauty, some fulfillment of hope.

Spring—"all bloom and desire"—is not the time for love to end. It is rather the growing time of every tender joy, and Homer Wilson found himself hoping against hope. He contrived to meet Myron very often now, in the early mornings or late twilight, as she traversed the *road between* the village and Mrs. Deans'. He had done

what he could to dissuade her from going to Mrs. Deans', but a refusal to do so meant a full acceptance of his aid. Myron held back her hand from such overwhelming alms. Homer had done, therefore, what he could for her—ploughed the little lot about her house and planted it with potatoes and vegetables for her, and mended the fence and piled great heaps of split wood in the woodshed.

He pleaded with her sometimes, but to no avail—at least none that was perceptible to him. The water beating against a rock does not realize its own victories; but we see the honeycombed cells that attest its persistence, and predict that some day the water will have won a way for itself over the fragments of the rocky barrier. But the springs run dry sometimes, and the rock remains unconquered, but barren and parched, thirsting for the water that loved it once. To each successive plea Myron felt it harder and harder to say "No."

When Homer asked for her love, his face shone with that seraphic light that never yet "has shone on land or sea," and she felt it very bitter to banish it. Sometimes he touched her to tears. Sometimes, dry-eyed, she begged him so piteously to desist that he felt himself a cur to have urged her.

Indeed, in those calm spring weeks his heart was the abode of perpetual conflict, the place of passion and pain, the home of love and longing—

> "O fretted heart, tossed to and fro,
> Rest was nearer than thou wist."

Through all these turbulent times Homer bore himself well. He had again the old genial manner, the old patience, the old generosity. His people presumed upon his unfaltering good-temper, and made their demands more and more exacting. He gave all they sought of his

time, trouble, and money, and to their reproaches replied not again.

Upon every subject under the sun he heard them patiently, save the one subject next his heart. That he held sacred.

His mother had said to him one day:

"You'll never marry her, Homer?"

"God knows I'm afraid I won't," he said.

"Do you mean to say——" began his mother.

"There is nothing but this to say," he answered, very quietly, but in a voice that silenced her; "I would give my right hand—my life—everything—if I could persuade Myron Holder to marry me."

So he left her; but his mother's incredulous exclamation, "You'll never marry her!" cankered in his heart like a bitter prophecy.

Afterwards, when Mrs. Wilson thought over all the days and doings of her son, she thought of this also, and told the conversation to her neighbors, and they all then looked upon Myron Holder as one who, having gotten a man's soul, would not let him assoil himself by marrying her.

But this was after.

The old rag peddler going his rounds stopped once more at Mrs. Deans' door. Little My trotted out from the kitchen, and the old peddler eyed him with the longing gaze of a childless man. Mrs. Deans bargained for her pie-plates, and My stood gazing reflectively at the big black horse.

"Say, Mrs. Deans," said the ragman, "whose young one is that?"

"Oh," answered Mrs. Deans, feelingly, "that's Myron Holder's brat!"

"You don't say! Well, 'taint much like the Holders. *I knowed* Jed," he added, after a pause.

That night the ragman drove home, his van heavily laden, and his wife helped him to bestow the canvas sacks in the barn, and later looked over his stock of tins and ran over the book. She was a queer little figure. Her dress was of dark woollen stuff that they gave her husband at the shoddy-mills. It was curiously and lavishly adorned with buttons: there were rows of buttons on the sleeves from wrist to elbow, a veritable breast-plate of them on the bodice; they jingled on her shoulders and glistened on her skirts.

In a deep-down corner of her miserly little soul there lurked a taste for finery. Denied legitimate expression by her miserliness, it found vent in this barbaric adorning of her gowns. The pearl and crockery buttons she did not use—those she sewed on cards to resell; but all the fancy metal ones she found on the rags, being unsalable, she appropriated toward the decoration of her penurious person, and let her fancy run riot in the arrangement of them.

"Where's the little red tin mug?" she asked her husband, as she pored over his ragged daybook. "I don't see it in the van, and I don't see it marked in the sales."

Her husband shifted uneasily.

"I give it to Myron Holder's young one. He was playing about the wagon at Deans'."

"You did!" said his wife. "You did! What for?"

"I knowed Jed," began her husband, apologetically; but he was cut short by a contemptuous snub from his wife.

This was the chronicling of a little incident that gladdened Myron's heart inexpressibly.

In Myron's mind there was slowly forming an idea at this time—an idea of change. It was but dimly shadowed forth yet; but when the time came for it to take definite shape, it did so at once, and was so well established that it

seemed the settled and legitimate conclusion of long reasoning. In the mean time the thought only came to her hazily—sometimes in the pauses of her work when she heard Mrs. Deans speaking of the town; sometimes when, in the early morning, she saw far away across the lake the smoke of a steamer; sometimes when, at noontide, the whistle of far-off trains smote through the air, or when, returning to the village at night, she noted the telegraph-poles, with their single wire. They seemed to incline from the village—away from its self-righteous roof-trees and censorious chimneys; away and above its babbling door-steps and carping streets—and to point out into a wider, freer, unknown world.

Often she turned to look along the way they pointed. They took her eyes eastward, and at night the eastern prospect is dull and gray. From this forbidding outlook she would turn her eyes, with a shudder, and they would fall upon the trees of Deans' woodland, illumined by the sun which set behind them.

But if the eastern gray made her despond, the western glow behind those trees made her despair. She withdrew her gaze and hastened to the blank twilight of the village.

It was summer, and Homer Wilson, walking through his fields, was thinking of Myron Holder. He had gone early to town that morning, and as he passed the cottage she issued, with little My, from the door.

The dew lay heavy on the grass; the silence was stirred by the singing of birds; the haze that lay over the land presaged a day of intense heat. The fires were being lighted in the village, and the first smoke was lingering lazily above the roofs. The hopvines about the cottage glistened at every point with drops of dew, and, as the sparrows twittered through the tendrils, they sent sparkling *little showers* down. The morning-glories that Myron had

planted beneath the window were covered with their cup-like blooms. There is no flower on earth more beautiful in delicate fragility of texture, in purity of tint, in shape and translucent color than a morning-glory with the dew upon it.

It was a morning to live and love in. And it seemed to Homer Wilson that the whole gracious aspect of the day was completed by the forms of Myron and her boy as they stood without the gate.

His heart yearned for her as he helped her into the wagon by his side. At Mrs. Deans' he lifted her down, holding her for an instant in his arms. The keen "possessive pang" that thrilled him shook his spirit with its sacred sweetness.

And to-night he was going to her with yet another prayer upon his lips.

The sultry day had fulfilled the prophecy of the misty morning. The air was heavy with odors. Every weed and grass, each flower and vine, each bush and tree, had given its quota of perfume to form the frankincense that nature offers to the midsummer moon. The exhalations from a million tiny cells mingled together in that odorous oblation.

And as he crossed the fields Homer saw the moon, round and red, rising slowly over the lake. Slowly—slowly—it rose, paling as it attained the higher heavens, until it soared—

> "In voluptuous whiteness, Juno-like,
> A passionate splendor"—

most worthy to be worshipped.

As Homer knocked at Myron's door the moon veiled itself behind some close-wreathed clouds, so that from the dimness of the cloudy sky Homer passed within the doorway.

The moon was still obscured when he emerged, so that his face was hid. But before him there stretched, at last seen with clear eyes, the definite dreariness of a solitary life. Behind him he knew a woman lay prone upon a bare floor, sobbing and wrestling with the evil of her own nature, with hard-wrought hands half-outstretched to him—half-withdrawn, to cover her shamed eyes. Within his breast he bore the memory, not of rejection or of rebuke, but the echo of a plea for mercy—the broken syllables of a woman's voice raised in an appeal for help against her own weakness.

Nor had it been made in vain. For Homer Wilson, in the moment of that supreme temptation, had risen superior to himself—had put aside his own strength to help her weakness—had overcome his passion with his love. He had uttered a passionate word or two of comprehension, offered an incoherent pledge of aid—comfort—approval—and then, stumbling out of the door, hastened away, disregarding, for *her* sake, the cry of "Homer—Homer!" that seemed to follow him.

. . . . . .

Each of us has a wilderness and a temptation therein, although oft we pass through it, unrecking of the devils that attend us until they have stolen all they sought. Sometimes our wilderness is a perfumed garden, through which insidious devils dog our laggard footsteps. Sometimes it is a shaded pleasaunce, through which we tread with stately steps, unwitting of the derisive demons that smile as they mock our pageantry of pride. With retrospective agony, we turn to gaze upon the mirages of these scenes, as one views sunlit seas where wrecks have been, and cry aloud, "Here much precious treasure was lost!" But there are other wildernesses wherein we wander, consciously beset with Evil Spirits whose faces we know.

It was thus with Myron Holder. Her wilderness was indeed "a land of sand and thorns," thorns whose acrid sap was sucked from salt pools of tears. And the Spectre Demon that beset her there was the Devil of her own passion. By day it lingered round her steps, tempting her with suggestions of the Lethean draught its pleasures would bring, whispering to her how excusable she would be if she yielded to its allurements; for it did not fail to point out that she had no debt of kindness to repay with worthiness.

All day she fought against this Tempting One, who speedily enleagued all the other evils of her nature to aid him.

The battle raged fiercely, the bright light in her eyes, the flaming cheeks and trembling hands attesting the strife. One night, when the heat of summer made even the night winds sultry, when all nature was in the full height of its development, when the fields were deep in grass and the clover heavy with bloom—on such a night the door of a hop-clad cottage in Jamestown opened softly and closed as gently, and through the sleeping streets and out into the country a wild figure sped. She, for it was a woman, with flushed cheeks and loose-coiled hair, advanced a short distance along the highway, and then, swiftly climbing the fence, made her way diagonally across the fields of dew-drenched grass—across one field, another, and another—holding her slanting course as steadily and unswervingly as though she followed a beaten track.

As she ran, the spirit of the night and the intoxicating odor of flowers and grasses entered into her and steeped her senses in a delirium of freedom. She sprang on—now running, now half-dancing, once going a rod or two in the old childish "hippety-hop" fashion.

She *reached the* boundary of Deans' woodland, and

plunged into its shadows with as little hesitation as she had entered the field of clover. She threaded the wood swiftly, her eyes fixed straight before her, never seeming to see the obstacles which opposed her path, although she avoided them unerringly.

Bats whose eyes have been pierced out exercise this same blind avoidance of obstacles, and it was only this woman's heart that had been wounded.

She held on her way.

At length she saw a far-off gleam of water, and knew she had all but reached her destination.

On she went, and, pushing through the dense mass of witch-hazel bushes that grew along the top of the lake bank, jumped. It seemed a leap to destruction, for Deans' woods bounded the lake here with high, precipitous cliffs; but the path to that spot was marked by her heart-blood, and she had made no error in following it. She had a drop of four feet or so; and then she stood upon a long, narrow, jutting ledge, surrounded by the tops of the trees that grew below it on the bank proper. From the top of the bank it was almost invisible—entirely so, unless the looker penetrated the witch-hazel hedge. From the lake it was plainly seen.

Here, then, she paused, looking forth over the water, and being scorned by the moon—

> "For so it is, with past delights
> She taunts men's brains and makes them mad."

. . . . . .

She stood upon the rocky point and held out her clasped hands despairingly. Her hair, loosened by many a tugging branch, fell about her in wild disorder—now blown across her flushed cheeks, wild eyes and parted lips; now *wrenched back* by the high wind, its whole weight stream-

ing behind her; now framing her face in dusky convolutions.

In the mute agony of her gesture, she seemed a fit emblem of despairing grief—the grief of Psyche for Adonis.

The moon broke from the embrace of its clouds and sailed high up into the night, then faded towards the horizon.

And still she stood, outwearing her passion by her patience. About her surged all the weird melodies that loneliness and night and despair smite from the heart-strings. The blood sang in her ears, a monotonous *obligato* to those piercing notes.

. . . . . .

She looked out into the night. Her eyes demanded from it some balm to soothe their burning; her heart some solace for its pain. Her soul cried out against the silence without, which seemed such a maddening environment to the fightings within. Her whole being demanded an answering emotion from some one or something.

"Shake out, carols!
Solitary here—the night's carols!
Carols of lonesome love! Death's carols!
Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon—
Oh, under that moon where she drops almost down into the sea!
Oh, reckless, despairing carols!"

But the moon was mute, the night silent, and she was alone. She could not analyze her own emotions, nor vivisect her own soul; could not separate shreds of Desire, fibres of loneliness, tissues of misery, until she had disintegrated the whole mass of Despair that was crushing her.

She could but suffer.

. . . . . .

She lay *prone* upon the ledge of rock, her hands clutch-

ing the short, glossy mountain grass; resisting the wooing of the airy space below that called her to oblivion, purchased by one leap outward—a leap—no, one single step—out into the kindly air.

How small a price at which to buy immunity from those thorny roads she trod with bleeding feet, alone! Alone? Ah! Little My! . . . The leaves were stirring with the morning's breath; the birds had not begun to sing yet, but were moving restlessly upon the branches and uttering their first waking calls—those ineffably sad heraldings of earliest dawn or latest night!

"Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns,
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds!"

The world lay silent under a reflectionless moonstone dome of gray when Myron Holder, with dew-drenched skirts and hair, relaxed limbs and pallid cheeks, entered the house where her child yet slept. Of the night's turmoil there was no trace save the signs of physical exhaustion. Her face was calm, her lips firm; her eyes shone undimmed with tears, unblurred by passion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Yea, then were all things laid within the scale—
Pleasure and lust, love and desire of fame,
Kindness, and hope, and folly, all the tale
Told in a moment—as across him came
That sudden flash, bright as the lightning flame,
Showing the wanderer on the waste how he
Has gone astray 'mid dark and misery."

OUTWARDLY the lives of Myron Holder and Homer Wilson gave no sign of these conflicts. It is the petty worries *and every-day* griefs of life that trace lines upon the

brow. A fretful discontent often leaves a wrinkle when a great grief obscures itself behind the placidity of despair.

Myron Holder's face now shone in unaltered—and it seemed unalterable—calm. That wild night had not been spent in vain. Self-poised, if humble, her life seemed centred calmly at last.

As for Homer Wilson; it was different with him. His heart was still parched with the "thirst that thirsteth on," but he no longer sought for draughts to slake it. His attitude approximated that of those who, dying of some dreadful disease, accept their fate and, looking the inevitable in the face, long for the end.

One day he found in his pocket the old bullet he had picked up from the crevice in the rock. He turned it over, wondering where he got it; then remembering, a bitter thought crossed his mind that he was like that bullet. His life-impetus gone, he was but a thing for the sun to scorn. Myron, no longer trembling for herself, felt a deep tenderness spring within her heart for Homer, and sought to show him in every way that he was her only friend and that she trusted him.

Myron had almost made up her mind to leave Jamestown, and a little incident that occurred one day strengthened this thought to a resolution. The school-house was quite near the Holder cottage: the playground bordered one side of the cottage garden; a fence of slackly hung wires was between them; beyond the fence in the playground was a little ditch with heaped-up sides, on which grew many yellow buttercups. This was a favorite haunt for the younger school children, and their voices came in mingled cadences across Myron's rows of vegetables.

One day in later summer Myron was at home from Mrs. Deans', having by that lady's desire brought the weekly

washing from the farm, to do it in the cottage. The windows were flung high, and through the rising steam from her washtubs Myron's eyes followed My's golden head as he trotted about the garden. Looking up once, she saw him standing by the fence, holding to one swaying wire and peering through at the children in the playground. A momentary pang shot through her heart—he seemed so isolated there; and yet the barrier that separated him from the other Jamestown children was so slight—just a slack-wire fence—that any one could see through, that hung irregularly between its supports, now so low that it could be stepped over, again so high it seemed impassable, only where it was so lofty the spaces between the wires were wide enough to creep through.

The sunlight shone on both sides the same. The buttercups straggled through to the vegetables, seeming by their persistence to wish to bloom there, and the singing of the catbird in the elm tree was as sweet to My's ears as to Sammy Warner's upon the other side.

Nature made no difference; nevertheless there was a barrier. My was effectually severed from the rest of the village, but he himself had not recognized that yet, and the next time Myron looked up she saw My had gone through the fence and had seated himself beside the others.

They had taken their places in an irregular row among the buttercups, jostling and nudging each other, saying "Gimme elbow room," and "Quit pushin'," as they settled themselves comfortably to the business of the moment.

This was the time-honored trial to decide which of them liked butter, ascertained by holding a spray of buttercups against the throat, so that the reflection was cast upon the uptilted chin. The taste for butter is proportionate to *the yellowness* of the reflection.

Little Jenny Muir was judge and the rest jury, craning their necks forward to look as she passed from one to the other, holding a bunch of buttercups against their chests whilst they tilted their chins far back. The dull blues, washed-out reds, and russet browns of the children's frocks enhanced the brilliant yellow of the flowers. The shadows of the big pear tree, glossy of leaf but barren of fruit, modulated the sunshine, so that the whole group showed in a soft, subdued glow, an idyl of child life not unlovely, for the heads in the row were not yet bent to the dust to search for money, nor lifted to heaven in self-righteous conceit. Time had not dulled the childish gold to brown, nor deadened the flaxen heads to lustreless drab.

My placed himself at the end of the row, his head a golden period at the end of the human sentence that spoke of life's beginnings. With unembarrassed childish mimicry, he emulated the gestures and laughter of the others.

Myron's heart lightened. She wondered for a moment if My might not in time merge his life with those others and be no longer solitary. The hope soon vanished. Looking out again, she saw My sitting alone, his head tilted far back as he waited for his turn. Just disappearing down the slight decline to the school-house, she saw the other children, their hands held over their mouths, their faces red with suppressed laughter, stepping with elaborate pretence of quiet, and turning now and then to look over their shoulders at My, sitting alone, his face patiently uptilted to the sun, unconscious of his loneliness. Beside him lay the bunch of buttercups, flung down as Jenny Muir clapped her hands over her mouth and fled across the soft sward.

In a moment Myron was out of the house, running down the path to the fence side. Ere she reached it, My's tired

little neck relaxed, and he looked about him wonderingly, the light fading from his face. His eyes were filled with tears, and his lips quivered when his mother called him. There was a hasty scramble over the ditch, a struggle through the fence, and My was back on his mother's side of the barrier. That straggling fence was, after all, not so easily crossed.

My had forgotten the whole affair ten minutes after, as he excitedly chased grasshoppers along the paths; but all day long the laughter of the playing children smote Myron's heart like the crack of a whip that stings.

After that day it became a matter of conscience for Myron to play the "buttercup game" with My, and a feverish eagerness fairly consumed her to get away from a place where even the children were cruel. She began to scrimp and save every penny she could, hoarding her meagre gatherings in the bottom of the old clock-case that stood on the shelf beside the window.

. . . . . .

It was late autumn. Between the tree-tops were skyey lakes of blue more brilliant than any blue of summer sky, more evanescent than any of spring. The sun shone through the tree-tops with an ineffable, clear, cold light, displaying every fibre in their leaves and imparting to them a fragility wholly sad.

A light uncertain wind rippled through the sumachs, giving their leaves a delicate, lateral movement, as though upon some aerial lyre they harped their own requiem, touching its invisible strings lightly with blood-tipped fingers, for the autumn coloring stained the green.

Between the boughs of the trees glistened those huge octagonal webs that the wood-spiders spin so persistently *at this season*. There was no sound of birds, only the

cheerless shrilling of the autumnal crickets and the dry rustle of dead leaves as the few grasshoppers left alive hopped torpidly from place to place till they came to the spot to die.

The katydids, that six weeks before had prophesied so cheerily the frost that was to kill them, lay here and there, little pale-green corpses, wrapped in their lace-like wings.

The tall weeds by the pathway, that in summer had disguised themselves with blossoms of different colors and shapes, now stood confessed, with panicles of burs crowning their dishonored heads.

It was upon such a day that Homer walked through his woods, searching for a young hickory tree suitable to cut down for axe-handles. His heart, caught in the embrace of the surrounding silence, suddenly stilled its throbbing to a steadier rhythm than it had known of late. He thought out clearly the motive that must actuate his life, the inspiration that must point his path.

Passion was indeed eliminated from his heart, but not forgotten. They tell us that when an arm or leg is amputated, one still feels shadowy aches and ghostly pangs, intensifying the desolate sense of incompleteness and loss. The maiming of one part of the body may preserve the whole alive, but yet one looks back with anguished regret to the days when he stood complete.

Homer Wilson was learning that each must "dree his ain weird," and the only complaint he made against his Fate was that he could not alter Myron's.

Night fell soon and swiftly now. The sun seemed glad to sink out of sight. Its feeble rays brought no heat to the leaves it had called to life. The sad silence of the trees seemed a mute reproach against the light that brought forth but could not sustain their foliage.

That evening in the chill twilight, Homer overtook Myron and her boy returning from Mrs. Deans'. Slackening his pace, he walked with them to the village. The air was very quiet, "silent as a nun breathless with adoration." As they passed along the road there came an earthy breath from the fresh-turned soil in the fields, where they had been lifting the potatoes and the turnips. It had none of the fresh fruitiness of spring: instead it was redolent with sad suggestions, an atmosphere in which one involuntarily lowered the voice and stilled a laugh.

They passed the little graveyard where the virgin bower clematis, already denuded of leaves, garlanded the pickets with brittle, bare, brown branches, softened here and there by the downy whorls of seed. Myron was telling Homer of her wish to leave Jamestown, and asking his advice. He had long felt this to be one possible solution of the position, but there were points that troubled him sorely. It was obvious that the best that could happen to Myron would be the return of the man for whom she had suffered so much. Homer confessed to himself that he had no hope that he would return, but yet had grown very uncertain and humble about his own judgment, and he thought Myron still believed in her betrayer's return. If he should return and Myron be gone? Would that not afford him a somewhat tenable excuse for continued infidelity? Suppose he should return and inquire for Myron Holder in the village? Homer sickened to think of the distorted picture that would then be drawn of her patient life.

As has been said, Homer had not a shadow of hope that he would return, but he thought Myron had. Sharpened as Homer's perceptions were by pain and love, they were not yet keen enough to grasp clearly how slight a shred of *hope remained* of all her brave fabric of belief. He could

not understand how much of Myron's faithfulness was due to her own womanhood, how little now to any hope of reparation. He therefore hesitated when, laying everything before him, she asked him to decide.

As they neared the village they walked yet more slowly. They had much to say, and since that midsummer night Homer had never entered the cottage door. There seemed to issue from its portals forever a voice calling, "Homer, Homer," a voice whose infinite longings and needs shook his soul with a sense of his own impotency.

Little My wearied, and Homer raised him in his arms. So they made their way to the cottage—they two alone, for the child slept, and a strange loneliness lay over the quiet road and empty street. Myron took My within doors, and, coming out, she and Homer paced, side by side, up and down the little centre path. On either side were vegetables and withering grass, and down in the far corner the huge yellow globes of the pumpkins showed solidly through the dusk.

"Indeed, Myron dear, it would be easier for you if you went," he said, as they stood together in the shadow of the elm tree; "and later on My might have a happier time. For my part, I would have spoken of it long since, only—only——" He paused, and added in lower tones, "I knew the hope you lived in."

She bent toward him and said, very quietly but steadily, "I have no vestige of that hope left, Homer."

He looked down at her, an eagerness that strove against repression in his eyes.

"No," she continued, "My and I must hold our way alone. Tell me, then, Homer, do you think it would be ever so little easier if we went away from here?"

Her eyes held his, pleadingly, and filled with tears. It was one of the *rare times* when she felt self-pity.

"Yes, dear," he said, taking her hands, that fluttered nervously; "yes, we will make it easier—we will find a way for you to leave all this behind. You shall go and lose yourself, so that their prying eyes shall never find you, their itching ears never hear of you, their lying lips have nothing to tell of you—only, Myron, you will never try to hide from me, will you?"

"Oh, Homer!" she cried, "I would be lost indeed then. Oh, no! I could not bear to have you forget me."

His face lighted in the dusk with a happiness that had long been a stranger—a chastened light, perhaps, when compared with the radiance evoked by his first love, but a steadier flame, lit in the heart, not in the eyes alone.

"Well, I will think it all out, Myron; to-morrow will surely find me with a way planned for you. I wish, indeed, that I too could go with you, that I also could find a road out of Jamestown."

He said good-night, and turned to go. He was almost at the gate when she ran after him.

"Wait a moment, Homer," she called softly; "wait!"

He turned quickly.

"You know how I think of you?" she asked. "You know you are my only friend—my dear friend—my brother? You know this? Do you think that going away from Jamestown will make up for not seeing you? I am afraid—I—I—I think, Homer, I will stay."

Homer gave a little laugh, so sweet these words were to him.

"My dear, you shall go away, and yet shall see me too, sometimes. I could not stand it to be without a sight of My and you now and then."

She clasped her hands.

"Oh, *could* I see you sometimes? Then think hard to-*night, Homer*, and find out the way to-morrow."

There was another good-night, and they parted.

The next day Myron, having been sent to the village by Mrs. Deans, went to the grocery store to buy some things for herself, for it was Saturday, and she did not go to Mrs. Deans' on Sunday. Whilst she stood waiting until Mrs. Wilson was served, My ran in and out of the door, a little, tottering figure, clad in a queerly made blue and white checked pinafore. Mrs. Wilson did her shopping leisurely, discoursing upon the pros and cons of asthma the while, for which she strongly recommended the smoking of cigars made of mullein-leaves. She turned from the counter at length, and, passing Myron Holder with uplifted chin, made her way to the door. It was encumbered with an open barrel of salt mackerel, by which stood little My, balancing slowly back and forth on his uncertain feet, the sun glinting on his yellow head. Mrs. Wilson pushed the little form roughly aside and went out. My swayed and fell, striking his head on the step.

Hot anger flushed Myron's cheeks at the incident. She picked up the boy, soothed him with a word or two, and gave him a biscuit from the bag the groceryman was weighing for her. My trotted off to the door, and presently crossed the threshold into the street.

Myron Holder was just opening the shiny old purse to pay for her small purchase when a confused sound of shouting and exclamations came to her. Through the hum of voices sounded the thud-thud of flying hoof-beats. Her eyes sought My. He was not there!

She and the groceryman reached the door in an instant. The street seemed thronged with people. Mrs. Wilson had just emerged from Mrs. Warner's, and stood with her at the door.

Homer Wilson was about to untie his team, that stood before the harness-shop just opposite the grocery store.

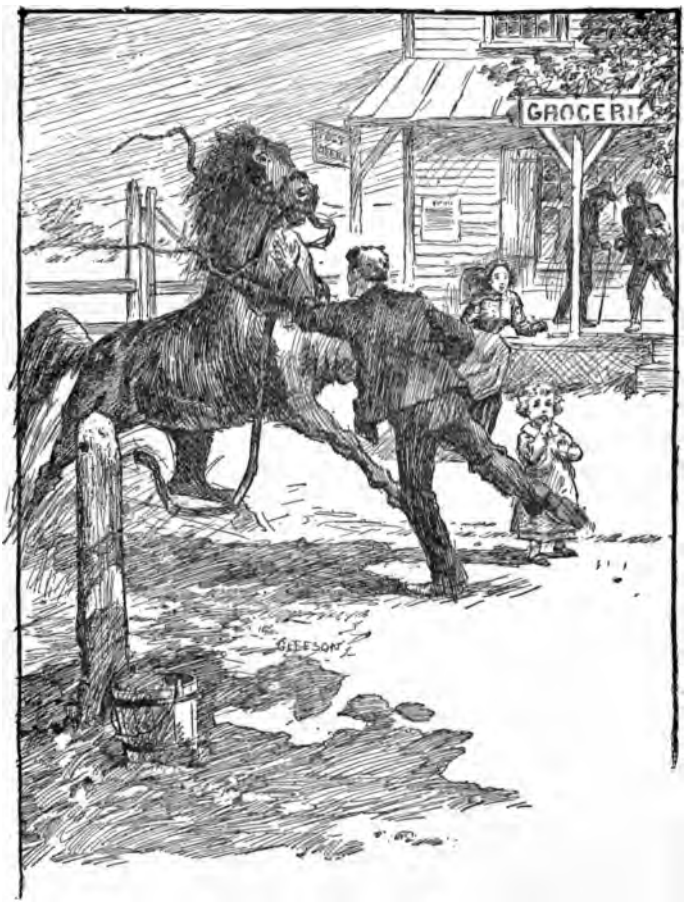
At the same moment that Myron emerged from the store Homer turned his eyes to the street. He saw and understood what Myron's anguished eyes had perceived at the first glance. In the middle of the sandy street, the biscuit in one hand, the corner of his pinafore in the other, his head shining in the sun which bedazzled his eyes, stood little My.

Thundering down the street, almost upon the child already, came Disney's great black horse, its huge head outstretched, its nostrils distended—two glowing scarlet pits—its lips drawn back, exposing the gleaming teeth flecked with blood-stained foam, flinging its forefeet out so madly that the glitter of its shoes could be seen from the front. Shreds of its harness clung to it and lashed it to greater fury.

Without a second's hesitation, Myron Holder rushed to her child—to death, as she doubted not. But another form sprang forward also. Homer Wilson darted diagonally across the street until he was directly in the pathway of the horse, but a yard or two beyond My. He had not time to steady himself before the brute was upon him. He grasped at the distended nostrils of the horse, caught them, but in a sliding grip,—the horse reared upright. There came two sounds—of hoofs, striking not on the resonant roadway, but with the horrible echoless blow that falls upon flesh, and then the horse swept on; but only one of his shoes was shining now, the rest were dim with blood and dust.

Myron snatched her child out of the way as the horse passed by a hand's breadth, and in a moment she was kneeling by Homer's side.

He was dying, but a flicker of life bespoke the want that could only go out with life. She raised his head from the *dust and kissed* him on the mouth. He opened his eyes;



HE HAD NO TIME TO STEADY HIMSELF BEFORE THE BRUTE WAS UPON HIM.

they met hers, and an ineffable and unearthly radiance overspread his face.

That was all. He had found his way out of Jamestown. Myron's was still to seek.

He was quite dead when the others reached him. His chest was battered in, and the calk of one hind shoe had pierced through the thick brown hair and brought death.

> "He has outsoared the shadow of our night,
> Envy, and calumny, and hate, and pain;
> And that unrest which men miscall delight
> Can touch him not and torture not again.
> From the contagion of the world's slow stain
> He is secure; and now can never mourn
> A heart grown cold, a head grown gray in vain."

Myron knelt by him, calling his name and imploring him to answer her. Rough hands pushed her aside. She fell, half-dazed. When she came to herself, My was crying by her, and a slow throng was moving towards Homer's wagon, where it stood before the harness-shop.

Myron rose and ran after them, but was met by a frightful figure of rage. The mother of the dead man, who had witnessed his death, rushed at her, shrieking out names of which "murderess" was the least hard, and would have struck her, but some one caught the upraised arm and bade Myron, with a curse, be gone.

Affrighted and bewildered, she caught up My and fled to the cottage.

Homer Wilson was carried in due time to the little graveyard. There followed a great train of slowly moving vehicles, for the Wilson family connection was a large one, and his tragic death drew people to come through morbid curiosity. Mr. Prew preached and prayed at length, and the throng lingered long about the grave.

Away behind the stone wall that flanked the far side of

the graveyard two figures stood hidden, watching the funeral rites from afar.

Myron had been refused admittance to the Wilson home when she had gone to plead for one look at Homer's face. She had been forbidden to enter the graveyard. But they could not prevent her bringing My through the desolate fields to watch with baby eyes the burial of the man who had saved his life.

There were many black-clad figures that day in the graveyard—many wet eyes—many lamenting lips; but the real mourners stood afar off, as we are told they did one day long ago when a cross with a living Burden was upreared upon a hill.

Mrs. Wilson wept that Homer had been "took unprepared." But who can tell what penitence or prayer purged his soul when, between the hoof-beats, he looked death in the eyes? Who can say there was not time for both plea and pardon in those seconds—if, indeed, there be One to whom prayers go, from whom pardons come—if there be One to whom a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night?

Well, all these things are for us to strive with, and few there be that bring back any trophy of truth from that warfare; yet "still we peer beyond with craving face."

As for Homer Wilson—

> "Peace, peace!—he doth not sleep;
> He hath awakened from the dream of life."

CHAPTER XIX.

"The road to death is life, the gate of life is death;
We who wake shall sleep, we shall wax who wane.
Let us not vex our souls for stoppage of a breath,
The fall of a river that turneth not again."

"All things are vain that wax and wane,
For which we waste our breath;
Love only doth not wane and is not vain—
Love only outlives death."

THE winter set in—a dreary, desolate winter of wind and rain, mud and slush. The snow never lay upon the ground for two days together, and the air, unpurified by frosts, hung heavy and dank over the land.

A black New Year makes a green graveyard, says the old proverb; and the wisdom of these old saws was demonstrated yet again that year in Jamestown, for there was much sickness. There was hardly a family that had not lost a member, scarcely a house in which there was no illness.

"There's a turrible lot of sickness," said Mrs. Deans to Mrs. Wilson one day at the church door.

"Yes, a turrible sight of it," agreed Mrs. Wilson. "The old folks is droppin' fast; but what's an ordinary sickness to what I've bore with?"

"That's so," said Mrs. Deans. "But a living sorrow's worse than a dead one, they say; and it's turrible when one's own flesh and blood goes wrong."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Wilson; "but it's turrible discouragin' when they're cut down in the midst and no one can say, 'What doest Thou?'"

Mrs. Wilson's tone implied that there might be some

consolation if she were permitted to "talk back" at the Lord. Mrs. Deans noticed this and said warningly:

"Don't murmur; whatever you do, don't murmur; we can't tell what a day may bring forth. Look at me, what I have to put up with—Henry all crippled up and not able to earn salt for his bread. No, don't murmur, whatever you do."

"I ain't a-murmuring," said Mrs. Wilson, somewhat aggrieved. "I'm sure it ain't Homer; it's his soul I'm thinking on. Might's well be took off in a fiery chariot as killed the way he was."

"Oh, it's discouragin', I'm bound to say it is," condescended Mrs. Deans. "Enough to take the ambition out of one altogether. I suppose you haven't heard about old Mr. Carroll, have you?"

"Why, no," said Mrs. Wilson, abruptly suspending the task of sniffling into her handkerchief under pretence of weeping. "Why, no; you don't tell me he's sick?"

"Yes, it seems he was taken last night with spasms, and they say he might have died and no one been the wiser; but one of that Dedham tribe he was always feeding up came over to beg something, and there he laid on the floor."

"Well, for the land's sake!" ejaculated Mrs. Wilson.

"Yes, I'm going over after dinner. I sent Myron Holder over to do what's needed this morning. They say the only words the old man's spoke sence he was took was to tell them to send to town for a doctor."

Here Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Deans parted, each joining different groups and spreading the news of Mr. Carroll's seizure.

The women resolved to go and see the ins and outs of his house for themselves—sickness is such an admirable *excuse for impertinent* curiosity to gratify itself.

The men speculated as to what would become of his property. There had been a story at the time he bought the property, some hint of family trouble, some whisper that he had "money back of him"— a hazy tale that he had come to hide from some sorrow that pursued him. But all conjecture was so vague that, instead of giving birth to any definite idea, it died away, only to be aroused when the village wondered at some act of generosity upon his part.

Old Carroll lived among them quietly—paying his taxes, going his own way and expressing himself freely upon every subject but his own affairs.

A week after his seizure he died, and a lawyer's clerk came from town and took possession of the house and charge of the funeral—in very different fashion from what his neighbors expected, for the body was taken away and sent to the great city, which in their eyes typified Babylon with all its sin and splendor.

The lawyer's clerk spoke with much deference of the dead man, and signified that the name of Carroll was high in the land; whereat the villagers bethought themselves that they had entertained an angel unawares, and were inclined to accuse the dead man of "doing" them.

Mrs. Deans boasted much of the intimacy of her husband with the old soldier, and speedily forgot the latter's impious sneers at foreign missions.

The farm was advertised for sale, and Disney bought the land he had so long worked on shares. Disney and his family moved into the empty house. Conjecture and interest gradually died away.

In the great city a woman with brittle, dyed hair and simpering lips and powdered throat laughed as, turning over a trunk full of odds and ends packed by the lawyer's clerk, she *came* upon a miniature set in pearls—laughed

and looked at the picture long; but the laugh died as she noted the freshness of the pictured face. Crossing the room, she set the miniature against her own cheek and leaned close to a mirror, comparing the two. And presently she cast the painting from her and fled from the mirror with widened eyes.

"I am old—old!" she said. "He is dead, and I am old! It is this room, which is too light—it is glaring—horrible!" And she drew even closer the shades of silk, through which the light shone with a soft roseate glow. Then she searched for and found the picture where it had fallen on a soft rug, and again went to the mirror.

But if the dimmer light softened the lines in her face, it gave the pictured face another charm—the soft illusion of mystery and youth. The woman gazed at the dual reflection long until her breath blurred the mirror, so that all was blotted out save the brightness of the gold frame and a pair of wild, questioning eyes. A sharp sob parted her lips, and the mirror was empty.

Not long after, this woman was found dead. By her side was an empty bottle, such as they sell poison in, and in her hand was a painting of a beautiful woman framed in gold. Those who found her said the picture resembled her a little.

But this was far away from Jamestown, where Myron lived and suffered. That winter was a very busy one for her. Tender of touch, strong of arm, brave of heart, she was an ideal nurse. It is said a great grief has before now made a poet out of what was only a man. Myron's sorrows had changed her from a commonplace woman to a creature of most subtle sympathies. The pleading of pained eyes was eloquent to her, and the curves of dumb lips told her the tale of their sufferings. The touch of *her hand* brought rest, the pressure of her palms, peace;

whilst the infinite sympathy from a heart that had itself been smitten eased those pangs which, keener than any physical anguish, rend those that are near death.

But Myron herself reaped no blessing of peace from these duties. What a strange fantasy it is to dream, as many do, that the occupation of nursing is one which heals a hurt heart and reconciles yearning hands to their emptiness! What dreary days did Myron not know! What solemn, silent nights, when alone, she sat at Misery's banquet and supped with Sorrow—with shame, regret, and betrayed trust to hand the dish.

> "We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
> In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
> We should count time by heart-throbs."

So some one says; and, reckoning by this higher notation, how many centuries of weariness had not Myron lived? The spring months came, scarce changed in sky from those of winter, only the gathering heat of the sun sent up "sorrow from the ground." Malaria, influenza, and typhoid overspread the country. The whole neighborhood was gloomy. The rain fell day after day. The plough horses splashed through mud, and the furrows filled with water behind the plough.

Myron had been working at a cousin's of Mrs. Warner's, whose baby was sick unto death. The child died, and its mother, in the first rebellion of grief, had said to Myron:

"'Tain't just—I can't think it is—nor right, neither—for my baby to be taken when there's so many left alive that ain't any use. There's old Humphries, and paralytic Henry Deans, and drunken Ann Lemon—what's the good of them to anybody—it's a shame!"

Myron soothed her as well as she could, but she burst forth again:

"Fancy my child dead! If it had been that young one of yours, now, there would have been some sense in it—a young one without even a name—*that* would have been a good riddance—but mine—mine!"

For once Myron's very soul was shaken with rage. She turned where she stood, and looked the other woman in the face.

"Oh!" she cried, "you wicked, wicked woman!"

The words carried all the accusation of outraged motherhood in their tones. The woman shrank back, and Myron, taking her boy, set off to the village.

It began to rain before they were half way. Myron's thoughts turned to Homer. She never forgot him for long at a time. It falls to the lot of few to be so sincerely sorrowed for.

She and My were both wet through when they reached the cottage, and Myron was very weary with the boy's weight. She lit the fire, and My played about in the kitchen. He was of a peculiarly sunny and equable disposition—

> "One of those happy souls
> Which are the salt of the earth, and without whom
> The world would smell like what it is—a tomb."

Myron was glad when the time came for bed, for she was utterly weary.

The old clock on the wall was pointing to one o'clock, when Myron suddenly started up, wide awake. The mother instinct, keener than her other faculties, had awakened her, not the boy. For the strange, low, gurgling sound he made would scarce have aroused the lightest sleeper, and Myron had been sunk in the deep sleep of exhaustion.

In a moment she had the lamp alight. The boy lay, his *blue eyes* wide open, his round cheeks scarlet with the

fatal flush of fever, his lips swollen and parted in gasping respirations, his body almost rigid with the efforts he made for breath. One glance showed her this. The next instant she was undoing the little nightdress and shirt. With tremulous haste she placed some goose-grease in a little tin and strove to melt it by holding it over the lamp. The light was weak and wavering. She removed the chimney, and thrust the cup into the flame. Her fingers scorched till the skin cracked; she did not know it. She applied the melted oil and flew to wet his parched lips. The horrible, croupy cough cut her to the heart as it issued from My's swollen throat. She used every remedy her homely skill suggested, some of them efficacious enough often—but little My was dying. His blue eyes were filming; his baby lips twitching; the little hands, that had of late grasped her fingers so firmly as to suggest protection, made wavering, feeble movements toward her face and bosom, or clutched with waning strength at his own tortured throat.

She knelt beside the bed. She hardly dared touch the little form before her lest the mother in her, which had grown fierce in her dread, should cause her to clasp it too close. She lifted her voice in prayer, and cried aloud in frightful accents of despair, entreaty, expostulation, nay, even of threatening. No prayer more eloquent of human agony ever beat against deaf skies, yet it was but the repetition of one word—"My—My!"

An hour crept by. The flush had deepened on My's cheeks; his eyes were glazed. Once again, in surpassing pain, Myron Holder called aloud her child's name. There came no heavenly answer; but the true little heart, beating so faintly, responded once more to the beloved voice. Little My's eyes cleared a space and his fingers closed round his mother's.

"*My's mama!*" He uttered the alliterative little babble

in strange, shackled tones. The woman—his mother—felt a stricture at her throat; she strove in vain to force it down as she answered:

"Mama's My."

A strange change passed over the little gray face, like a gleam of sunlight on a wintry day—hardly that—like the watery nimbus of the sun through a cloud. It was little My's last smile.

"Mama's My," the woman whispered; and, true to his love-taught lesson, My strove to give the answer, "My's mama." The first word was articulate, the last but half-shaped ere the stiffening lips were drawn in the convulsion which ended time for little My.

Over him "the eclipsing curse of birth" had lost its power.

At daybreak next morning a messenger knocked long at the door of the Holder cottage. He had been sent in haste to summon Myron back to the house she had left in such anger the day before. Finding he could get no response, he lifted the latch and entered the kitchen. It was empty. There was a strong odor of kerosene oil, and absolute silence reigned. The man crossed the kitchen to an open door, and looking in saw the bedroom. Upon a little table stood a lamp which had evidently burned itself out. The chimney was off, and a great sooty blotch against the wall showed how the wick had smoked. In a chair by the bed sat Myron Holder, her eyes fixed straight before her—her pose rigid—her face pale as that of the dead child she held upon her knees.

"What is it, Myron?" he gasped.

"He's dead," said Myron, in the hoarse tones of one whose throat muscles are constrained and swollen.

The man turned and made for Mrs. Warner's. The cottage soon filled. Myron neither stirred nor spoke.

They took the child and prepared it for burial. They told her to eat, and she swallowed the bread and tea they placed before her. All her faculties were benumbed, absorbed in an effort to realize her loss.

. . . . . .

The little plain coffin was in the kitchen, surrounded by a group of people that filled the room—those who considered it part of a Christian's bounden duty to attend funerals. Mr. Prew, sent for by Mrs. Deans, had just finished his address. Myron, with bare head, and hands clasped on her knees, was seated by the coffin, gazing down at the face there, when there was a sudden stir at the door, and Mrs. Wilson pushed herself through the throng.

"Wait!" she said, authoritatively, to Mr. Muir, who was advancing to screw down the coffin-lid. "Wait!" Then she turned to Myron Holder. "Listen to me, Myron Holder," she said. "Is that child my grandson?"

"No," said Myron, rising to her feet, and giving a helpless look around at the curious faces about her.

"What!" said Mrs. Wilson. "What, you'll lie in the very face of your dead child! Lay your hand on that coffin, Myron Holder, and then tell me if that ain't Homer's son!"

Myron sank by the coffin and flung her arms athwart it.

"*He is not!*" she cried. Then her long calm gave way, and she began to sob and cry. "He belongs to none of you; he is mine—my own baby—my own child—My—My!"

Mrs. Wilson left the house. Mr. Muir put aside the clinging arms and prepared the coffin for burial. Some one led Myron to a wagon and she got in.

Mr. Muir was not free from fears when they stopped at the paupers' corner of the graveyard. Myron looked around, half-dazed, when she alighted, and, advancing, touched Mr. Muir's arm.

"Why here?" she asked, pointing to the open grave. "Why not by father?"

"Your grandmother sold the other half of the lot," said Mr. Muir hastily.

Mrs. Deans watched the little scene with much inward satisfaction. Myron made no further sign, uttered no other word. The coffin was lowered into the grave.

Mr. Prew put up a prayer, in which petitions for the "child of sin" and the "sinful mother" were about equally balanced. The throng departed each to his own place. Old Humphries filled up the grave, and Myron was left alone.

The next day she went to Mr. Muir's and inquired how much she owed him. He told her, and to his surprise she paid him at once. Then she set out for town, along dreary country roads, betwixt desolate fields, until she came to the outskirts of the straggling town; through these, until she was absorbed in the hurrying throng that crowded the narrow streets.

It was very late when she returned to Jamestown, and as she passed the Deans place she encountered Gamaliel, just returning from some expedition with his bosom friend.

"Hullo, Myron; where've you been?" he asked.

"I've been to town," said Myron, still in those strange, hard tones, and passed on.

There was much speculation as to her errand, which was set at rest when a few days later a wagon entered the little graveyard and the men who came with it proceeded to put up a tiny white tablet at the head of a new-made grave. On it there was carved only one word, and that a short one—MY—a word which in its brevity and meaning was not unsuitable as an inscription over that grave. Myron had spent the last penny of her painful savings in marking the *spot where her* child lay.

"Let grief be her own mistress still.
She loveth her own anguish deep
More than much pleasure. Let her will
Be done—to weep or not to weep."

So says the humanest of our poets; but such luxurious grieving is for those who fare delicately and live in kings' courts. Myron Holder had her bread to earn—her feet were tied to the treadmill of toil.

So she fared forth on her journey as best she might; and then, and for long after, Jamestown women told how Myron Holder perjured herself with her hand on her dead child's coffin.

CHAPTER XX.

"When some beloved voice, that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new—
What hope? What help? What music will undo
That silence to your sense?"

"I'll tell you, hopeless grief is passionless."

It was the season of the half-yearly revival meetings in Jamestown. The little Methodist Church filled rapidly. There was a *soupçon* of pleasurable excitement about a revival which was very enticing to the youth of Jamestown. Besides, all the "stiddy" young men were expected to go, and they always did what was expected of them.

Mrs. Deans came in with the minister, her face, with its self-important expression, irradiated with the glow of spiritual as well as worldly well-being. She had proffered

her bid for the company of the officiating ministers in good season, and the first of them had been knocked down to her in consequence, much to the chagrin of the Mesdames White, Wilson, Disney, and the rest, for they knew that the second minister on the list was an old personal friend of Mrs. Deans and would doubtless elect to stay at her house; thus they would have no opportunity to display their pious zeal and forehanded housekeeping.

Mrs. Deans' self-complacency was veiled, but not obscured, by an anxious air, as who should say, "I am not free of responsibility if all does not go off well."

It is a weakness of such women to consider themselves divinely appointed judges of the souls of their neighbors and friends.

The minister with her was pretty well hidden among the cluster of men and women to whom Mrs. Deans was introducing him. She introduced him with discrimination, however. She did not propose giving any one the chance of prefixing a remark with "The other night when I was speaking to Mr. Hardman," or "Mr. Hardman said to me the other day," unless she felt quite sure the recipient of the honor was worthy of it.

But to her consternation, Mr. Hardman broke bounds, passed the confines of the little group of important church members, and went out from one to another of the men and women, picking out, with the unerring divination of a man whose heart is in sympathy with the sorrows rather than the joys of mankind, the oldest, most forlorn, most miserable-looking of his prospective hearers.

To see the minister thus throwing away the apostolic benediction of his smile upon old Ann Lemon and Clem Humphries whilst Mrs. White stood with uplifted nose in the doorway, unnoticed, was an unholy thing, more particularly as Mrs. White, willing to have her discomfiture

shared by some one else, turned to Mrs. Deans with a surprised air, and said:

"Why, I thought the minister was with you?"

"So he is," Mrs. Deans was fain to avow. "We came a few minutes ago. He is great on missions, I think, and young." The latter half of her sentence was given in the tone of a hostess who excuses a guest. For the rest, it is probable that both ladies regarded his present occupation as distinctly a missionary effort.

Presently the minister straightened himself and proceeded up the aisle to the platform. Mrs. Deans' expression changed from an anxious, proprietary one to one of spiritualized commiseration. Was the misguided man actually going to begin service without asking one word about the ordinary routine of services in Jamestown Methodist Church? If so, he would make a fine hash of it.

Besides she had not informed him that a collection was to be taken up to defray the cost of extra lighting, etc., and she had promised Mr. White at class-meeting to do so. She had thought of telling Mr. Hardman, but preferred waiting until the minister sought for information before imparting it. His opportunity for that was now past, unless, indeed, he descended from the platform to do so. A pleasing thrill, inspired by this idea, turned to a chill as she saw Mr. Hardman take from his pocket a well-thumbled and shabby little Testament, and, opening it, seem to find a place. Then he laid it down, open, upon the big church Bible, and rose to pray.

Mrs. Deans' expression of anxiety was now unalleviated by any spiritual exaltation; it was unvariegated gloom. Any man who could disregard the gilt edges, thick covers, and ornate binding of that book, and leave it closed whilst he read from what her experienced eye told her was a Bible *Society Testament* that probably cost ten cents, was

certainly in need of anxious watching. Nor was it to be supposed that a discourse begun upon lines like these would be productive of much good. How many sermons she had heard rounded off by the banging of those covers together! How many final injunctions had been given a dramatic and artistic interest by the holding of that book, half-open, ready to put a period to the peroration by a sanctified thud!

Well—Mrs. Deans sighed audibly.

Mr. Hardman began to read in a deep and sympathetic voice. He was a tall man, of twenty-eight, muscularly built, but not brawny; his studies had been too close to admit of that. He had square shoulders, rather higher than they should be, and rounded with the stoop that the scholar and the ploughman share. His hands, as he raised them in infrequent gestures, were seen to be rather broad and short—hands, it would seem, of a mechanic, but not toil-stained. Indeed, their whiteness so ill agreed with their shape that a sense of something incongruous forced itself upon one when looking at them. His hair was almost black, and was tossed and disarranged by his habit of running his fingers through it. His face was pale.

His brow was square and overhanging—of the penthouse order, rather forbidding; the brow inherited from a generation of toilers, men who, from their own bleak corner of the world, looked forth at the panorama of life with sombre eyes, intrenching themselves behind a barrier of silent endurance, concealing their weakness, their wants, their hopes and fears, their few joys and pitiful ambitions behind an impenetrable mask, until it would seem that their lineaments adjusted themselves to their mental attitudes; and this, their son, presented to the world this square brow, strong, secret, sad. But its sternness, and alas! a great deal of its strength, was negatived *by the eyes* which looked out from beneath it. Very dark-

gray these eyes were, and made eloquent by the expression of infinite love and sympathy for his kind; but their dilating pupils evidenced an emotional nature, and they were somewhat too soft for a man. Yet, looking in steady kindness at the world, they often seemed fit eyes for a strong, calm soul.

But Philip Hardman felt himself neither calm nor strong. As he looked upon the expectant faces of those before him, the doubt which was gnawing at the heart-strings of belief suddenly seemed to grip his own heart and brain and threaten each.

He had no message to give these people! What were they there for? Was it not all a myth and a delusion? Was it?

Then he broke the spell which held him, and his words rushed forth. His congregation stirred and swayed and yielded—not to persuasion, for of that there was none; not to the minister's personality, for they had forgotten him; not in the hope of reward, for he spoke but of wrath and pitiless requital of sin, and merciless judgment, and endless woe—they yielded to their own fears.

For this man was lashing his own soul with the copyrighted invective of his sect, pronouncing against himself and (as in the midst of his mental agony he realized) against all mankind a doom of woe and wrath if they did not believe. He strove to terrify his own soul into the submission it denied, and strove to awaken in the people before him a reflex of the emotion he fain would feel. They responded to his words, but not to his feeling. They wept and abased themselves because of the fear, not because they feared unbelief.

Cold drops trickled down Mrs. Deans' face and bedabbled her second-best bonnet-strings. Mrs. Wilson grew almost *hysterical*. Ann Lemon wondered vaguely if she

had "the horrors," and held on to the pew with both hands, whilst she looked about her with bewildered, lack-lustre eyes. Clem Humphries sat outwardly unmoved, but inwardly vowing if he "once got out of this he'd never be wheedled into a revival meeting again."

The younger men thought revival meetings "no slouch," as Gamaliel Deans expressed it; and, comparing the excitement with that of a cock-fight he had attended *sub rosa* in the old brewery, he decided in favor of the revival.

The minister's voice failed and faltered. Like all magnetic natures, his exhausted itself. He paused, looked at the men and women before him, and, realizing the shallowness of their facile emotions, felt the pall of self-disgust envelop his soul. A horrible contempt for himself and them, even for the religion that had inspired this mental debauch, overwhelmed him. He shuddered as he realized the impiousness of his own thought, left the platform, went swiftly down the aisle and out into the darkness.

Mr. White closed the meeting, and prayed enthusiastically for the "young brother who had so awakened them," and ended amid a chorus of ejaculations.

Mrs. Deans, finding herself so agreeably disappointed, went home content. She wished to-morrow night were come. What crises of emotion might not be expected then! She found Mr. Hardman pacing the veranda slowly, his brow bare to the stars; his frame was relaxed and weary, his eyes tired. He refused any refreshment, and long into the night Mrs. Deans heard him pacing back and forth.

. . . . . .

Another night had come, and Philip Hardman was again to stand before an assembly of his fellows and voice the truths they held eternal. Mrs. Deans had no doubts now as to his competency. She anticipated an exciting *struggle with* spiritual foes, and the better to gird herself

for the fray, went early, leaving Mr. Hardman to follow. She felt this implied a delicate compliment to the preacher, recognizing in it a *simulacrum* of John the Baptist's mission in the wilderness.

So Philip Hardman was left to walk the mile from the Deans farm-house to the village alone. It was evening—late evening in summer. The air was filled with that indefinite, receptive murmur the earth gives forth as it opens its pores to the dew. Without wind, there was yet a sense of motion in the atmosphere, at once calming and exhilarating. It brought a keen sense of the fact that the world is rushing through space, with its puny burden of men and their works. The sun had set, but the western sky was radiant with an amber afterglow, against which the tree-tops in Mr. Deans' woodland showed a mass of dark, billowy green, the light behind them intensifying the depth of their color, so that they showed sombrely against the sky.

Before him stretched the dusty road, the grass at either side parched by the heat; now and then a maple overshadowed him; now and then he startled nested birds from out the low-growing trees of the wild plum. He walked swiftly, the grasshoppers and little whirring insects and dragon-flies flitting about his path.

At a turn in the road, where Mr. Deans' land joined Mr. White's, was wedged in the little cemetery of Jamestown. It was fenced with sharp-pointed palings, over which the native virgin bower clematis clung in feathery festoons, just blossoming out in fragile greenish-white flowers. Within, he saw the untidy graves and inebriated gravestones of a country churchyard. Those slanting stones and graves, almost obliterated by masses of periwinkle and white-leaved balm and ribbon grass, appealed to him strongly.

He looked at his watch. He had started in fair time,

but, lost in thought, had walked very quickly. He had time to linger a few minutes here. Perhaps amid the graves of Jamestown's dead he might learn the open sesame to the hearts of the living.

He entered through a gap in the palings, pushing his way through a little thicket of thorny locust bushes that had sprung up in a scattered cluster. The graves were nearly all marked by gravestones. In Jamestown it was considered a mark of respectability to erect a memorial to one's dead, but this done, all care for their graves ceased. Philip Hardman wandered about, noting the weather-beaten grayness of the older stones and reading their inscriptions almost mechanically. One broad, thin slab, with a weeping-willow sculptured upon it, bore a legend in memory of "Amelia Warner, beloved wife of Josiah Warner, aged sixteen years." Poor little wife! In the fifty years of her rest her grave had sunken almost level with the path; the lichen on the stone was striving to obliterate her name there, even as it had been long ago forgotten upon earth. A wild hawthorn bush was springing from under one corner of her tombstone and tilting it over perilously.

Some of the more recent graves had odd little jingles of original rhyme carven upon their stones. One, of but a year before, bore the brief prayer, too human for its glistening coldness, "Meet me in Heaven." Hardman read the name on this grave with a little start—"Jennie Best, wife of William Best." Yesterday Mrs. Deans had pointed out William Best and his new-made bride. How futile and absurd the little legend seemed! But Jennie Best slept as securely and as sweetly as though her husband still cherished in his inmost heart these last words of hers and walked as though he hoped to realize them, instead of writing them upon her tombstone and marrying within a *year of her* death.

There were graves of old and young in this little churchyard—men and women, boys and girls, infants of days, and men of many years. Beneath one stone slept seven friends, who "perished in the yacht *Foam* off the coast"—a narrow space, truly, for seven to occupy, set in this out-of-the-way village; seven such as these who had hoped to fill great places in the world before their lives were laughed out by the little ripples of the lake.

The shadows lengthened. Gleaming through the dusk, Hardman noticed a white stone with gilt lettering. "Homer Wilson" was the name it bore, but it meant nothing to the preacher; only he sighed as he noted the age of the man sleeping there, and a half-envious thought crossed him, as he looked around, that "these had completed their journey."

Philip Hardman turned his steps to the road again, but he paused yet once more. Close under the shadow of the high stone wall which bounded the graveyard on the village side, he almost stumbled over a woman's figure, which, in the deepening gloom, he had not observed. She was almost prone beside a little mound whereon the sods had not yet taken root. The woman's arms were outstretched toward the grave—almost embraced it. Her whole attitude spoke eloquently of a hopeless and passive despair.

Hardman stopped a moment irresolutely; she had not observed him.

"You are in great trouble," he said, bending down and touching her shoulder.

"Yes," she answered, raising her head without a start. "Yes."

Her voice was painfully constrained. The words seemed to issue with difficulty, and the tones were harsh. Speech seemed strangely dissonant with the hour and place. Her mute *despair* seemed the only fitting emotion for the scene.

Her eyes, from out a pallid face, looked up at him, filmed by misery. Her cheeks were hollowed in delicate shadows. Her pale lips drooped. She seemed the Mourning Spirit of the place.

"Come and pray," he said, looking at her with infinite pity in his kind eyes. "Come," he urged.

He waited for her reply, but none came. She was sitting by the grave now, her hands locked round her knees, her eyes looking hungrily into vacancy and seeing neither hope nor recompense for her pain.

A bat held its angled flight past them. He roused himself to a sense of time. He looked down upon the woman at his feet, an expression of ineffable compassion lit his face; then he turned to go.

As his eyes left that pallid face the scene seemed to darken suddenly. He realized the lateness of the hour, and, finding his way out of the graveyard, strode rapidly to the church.

After all, he was in time—indeed, had a few minutes to spare. He did not, however, again shock Mrs. Deans by a promiscuous friendliness. He went straight to the platform and sat down behind the reading-desk. His thoughts reverted to the woman whom he had just seen, and he felt he ought to have made a more eloquent appeal to her to come to church. Mental habit led him to decide at once that prayer was the only efficacious cure for grief such as hers. It was thus with this man always. In calm moments, when all went well with him, he strove to elucidate those problems of reason and right which presented themselves to him in season and out of season—strove to live a life of austere truth without factitious aid of self-delusion, without hope of ultimate reward.

But in times of distress or pain, whether his own or others', *he turned again* to his old beliefs, and prayer appealed to

him as the only panacea. Orthodox folk plead this as a triumphant and sure vindication of the truth of their creeds. It may be in some cases, but in Philip Hardman's it was only the result of inherent weakness of will and vacillating decision, and, alas! a cowardly shrinking from mental torture. Face to face with grief such as this woman's, he could not bear to look the inevitability of such bereavements in the face; could not endure to think of the irreparable loss of a vanished life; could not calmly recognize one single instance of what he was ever mourning over—the sadness and futility of life.

He must hallow each blow as a "merciful dispensation;" muffle it from prying eyes with the tabooed veil of "sacred predestination"; set it beyond close scrutiny by asserting to himself the impiety of questioning "divine will"; and at such times the beauty of his solacing faith lit in his soul fresh fervor for the cause.

For a few moments Philip Hardman sat motionless. The hands of the clock reached the hour for service to begin. His audience settled themselves in the pews and stilled themselves to attention.

Mrs. Deans ostentatiously ceased her whispered remarks to Mrs. Wilson, straightened herself in her seat, looked about with a critical and judicial eye, and then, convinced that all was well, hemmed several times expectantly.

Philip Hardman rose, and, in brief words, asked for Divine guidance through the service. He ceased. The bowed heads were raised. He was about to begin the reading of the Scriptures, when, silently, slowly, Myron Holder entered the open door and, advancing only to the nearest seat, which happened to be in the farthest back pew, sat down. So quiet were her movements that, save by a few of the young men who had taken the rear seats the better to observe the antics of the elect, she was unobserved.

Philip Hardman, however, had seen her. He changed his intention of reading, and announced a hymn instead. He wanted a few minutes to familiarize himself with that tragic face before attempting to utter any message of love or hope to the woman who had thus obeyed his suggestion. While the singing went on he looked at his audience, and, in a flash, their narrow, sordid, often miserable lives seemed revealed to him. These were the people he had lashed with spiritual fears the night before. As he recalled it, his heart smote him with terrible reproach. His eyes grew dim as he looked at the people before him and saw, shining through their midst, the pallid face of Myron Holder.

By what strange chance had this woman come to Jamestown? For he decided at once she was no native of the village. The purely cut, martyr face; the broad brow, sensitive lips, and cameo-like nostrils were too utterly unlike the other faces in the church to be for one moment associated with them.

There came to him a fantastic thought, that this woman was sent to bear the griefs of this village, even as One long since—the Carpenter's Son—had borne the griefs of the world and become a "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." But alas! this woman had no divine message to give; instead, she was wandering in the wilderness of hopeless despair. But—and Hardman's hand tightened on his Testament—a message she should have.

"Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee.
Leave, oh, leave me not alone!
Oh, protect and comfort me!"

So they sang. Philip Hardman found his place—

"All my hopes on Thee are stayed,
All my wants to Thee I bring;

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Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of Thy wing."

Rapt in an infinite sorrow for his kind—inspired by the need of this woman of help—exalted by the dependence and confidence expressed in the hymned words—seeing in all his audience but one pallid face—Philip Hardman rose to speak.

This choosing of a subject upon the spur of the moment, to meet the needs of one woman, was no disadvantage to him, for he was a fluent and ready speaker, and his whole training had been that spontaneity was absolutely essential. He had none of the measured method that develops a subject into "three heads and an application." The evangelistic sect to which he belonged abjures notes, and hops along to the halting cadence of a quasi-inspiration.

Happily, however, it has now and then a man like Philip Hardman, whose words flow freely forth, and never so eloquently as when heart and sympathies are touched. Hardman was never at a loss for words of his own to translate his feelings into language; but this night his sermon was but the enunciation of a sweet and comforting doctrine uttered in the language of the Book which has preserved it.

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," he said, and held out as a free gift the inestimable boon of peace. "I will not leave you comfortless," uttered in his vibrant tones, bore the assurance of divinest aid. "Let not your heart be troubled," he voiced as a sacred command to cease from grief, and then the general invitation, "Let whosoever will drink of the water of life freely."

With these words as a thesis, a human heart to be comforted, a soul alight with belief and confidence, a rare natural eloquence to frame his plea—was there any won-

der that the sermon was effective, any wonder that to the weary heart of the listening woman it appealed almost irresistibly?

Perhaps Philip Hardman dwelt too exclusively upon the blessings of his religion, ignored too utterly the thorn in the crown—offered it too freely, avowed it too confidently. But what will you? Even the greatest purists in religious faith find it hard to disabuse their minds of the idea that martyrdom means and merits the Kingdom, and Philip Hardman's theology was not of the sternest sort.

He felt, somehow, that this woman had suffered enough to win Heaven, whether she merited it in other respects or not. So he set himself to present his faith to her in the most glowing aspect, always seconding his message with his eyes.

Just as Philip Hardman saw but one face in his audience, so Myron Holder was, after the first few moments, unconscious of any other presence save his. Her eyes had won a straight path to his face between the heads and shoulders, and her gaze never faltered. There was a tall, white-shaded lamp on each side of the desk. As she looked, his figure, in strong relief against the light-blue background of the walls, seemed to absorb and radiate the light. It was simply an ordinary optical effect, and Myron Holder herself recognized vaguely that it was "only the light," and yet that pale irradiation around his head seemed to add a dignity and sanctity to the man and lend his utterance a deeper, higher import.

Her eyes never left his face—that kind, weak face, so full of contradictions, whose beetling brow seemed ready to do battle for his Faith, whose lips quivered with the feeling in his own voice.

Her eyes were hot and dilated from the long strain when, with hands upraised above the standing people, he

uttered the benediction, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Amen."

Philip Hardman descended from the platform and strove to make his way toward Myron, but he was hemmed in by outstretched hands, and had to make his way slowly through a throng, all eager to say "Good-bye," for he left on the morrow. Myron was just stepping out of the shelter of the porch when he overtook her. He held out his hand, which she took, her own toil-hardened one trembling in the clasp of his softer fingers. He looked down at her and spoke with great gentleness:

"Did you take the message I gave you to-night?"

"Is it for me?" she asked.

"Surely," he answered.

"You do not know me; you cannot tell. If you *knew*"——

"Whosoever will," he replied, with steady emphasis. And in his heart he marvelled at the humbleness of this woman, whose candid brow and clear eyes bespoke her life.

Then, the man mingling with the priest in him, he continued, still more gently:

"The message is even to the greatest sinner. To see you is to know you have the right of one of the least."

She put up two hands, clasped in miserable deprecation; her cheeks flamed red an instant, then paled to a ghastly white; she turned silently, and swiftly went down two steps of the broad entrance stair; then pausing and looking back at him with a gaze such as one might fix upon the flames before he steps into them, she said clearly:

"Ask Mrs. Deans who Myron Holder is!" She slipped away, the gloom of the unlighted street absorbing her figure, as though it gathered to itself its righteous belonging.

CHAPTER XXI.

"We are the voices of the wandering wind,
Which seek for quiet, and quiet can never find.
Lo! as the wind is, so is mortal life—
A moan, a sob, a sigh, a storm, a strife."

NEXT morning Philip Hardman left Mrs. Deans' early. He was leaving by the first train from the little flag station which was at the far end of the village; besides, he was determined to see Myron Holder.

Mrs. Deans had endeavored to dissuade him from this, but he was firm, and, recognizing this, Mrs. Deans suggested that she accompany him upon his mission; but he stated gently, but firmly, that he could achieve better results alone. Mrs. Deans felt bitterly aggrieved at being treated thus, for behind his gentle words she read a settled determination "to keep her out of it," as she phrased it to herself.

She bade him good-bye, however, with well-affected geniality, as he stood upon her doorstep; but the shallow smile died very soon, and a malevolent expression replaced it upon her fat features.

"I'll speak to Brother Fletcher about this," she said. "That Hardman is sorely puffed up in his own conceit and vainglorious! Well, by himself he can do nothing," she concluded, piously.

But whether it was the absence of the Lord or herself from Hardman's side that was going to militate against his success she left undetermined. There might also have been some doubt in the mind of the impartial hearer as to whether she was glad or sorry that his mission was likely to be a failure. Certainly her tone was not indicative of any *great grief.*

She betook herself indoors, and set about preparing a fresh supply of country dainties for the Reverend Fletcher.

Philip Hardman's face changed also after he turned it from Mrs. Deans' self-contented countenance, and the new expression was not far removed from one of disgusted contempt; and, it must be confessed, a somewhat sneering bitterness made his keen eyes sombre. He had asked Mrs. Deans the night before who Myron Holder was, and had been told—told! but in such a fashion! Mrs. Deans' evil words still stung his heart with shame for his kind. He felt as though one had smitten his lips with nettles.

And the pious speeches with which Mrs. Deans had besprent her tale—bah! It was like sprinkling a weak disinfectant over a heap of filth. It was indeed the "poison of asps" to hear Scripture—nay, the very words of his Master—so defiled.

Well, Hardman compressed his lips and hurried on.

The morning was sweet and calm, the "shoreless air" very clear and still, and, little by little, his spirit attuned itself to the hour; shred by shred, the mantle of bitterness fell from him. The memories of the evening mingled with the hopes of the morning, into a draught that was very sweet to him. When he reached the cottage door his eyes were exalted, his lips calm, his heart confident.

The door was open, and through it he saw a bare room, the walls stained a deep yellow with ochre; a carpetless floor, comfortless but clean; a square table, with a coarse white cloth covering it, stood in the middle of the room; upon it was some food. Myron sat there alone, but there was another plate laid, beside which stood a battered tin mug. All this he took in at a glance, and then his eyes fastened upon the woman's face. She was as yet unconscious *of his presence*. She sat at the table in such a

position that the profile of her face was outlined sharply against the bright yellow of the walls.

Her face, as he beheld it thus for the first time in clear daylight, struck him with swift remembrance of an exquisite picture he had once seen, a meek-mouthed Madonna painted on a bright brass plaque. There was the same pose of head, the same heavy knot of nut-brown hair, the same outward sweep of the lashes from the same drooped lids, the same exquisite line where the cheek softened to the throat. But, alas! there was no heavenly nimbus round this living head, no holy glow of happy maternity, no pure halo of womanhood.

At that moment Myron turned towards the doorway, and, as her eyes met his, his imagination suddenly supplied the aureole that before she seemed to lack, and, in completion of the picture, a stray line or two of poetry came back to him with all the happy force of applicability:

> "Eh, sweet,
> You have the eyes men choose to paint, you know;
> And just that soft turn in the little throat,
> And bluish color in the lower lid,
> They make saints with."

He started as he realized that he was comparing the Madonna to this unblest mother—an ideal of saintly beauty to this sinning one. But all in an instant there came to him a swift certainty that this was not the face of an evil woman. This woman bore in her countenance the indelible lines of pain and suffering, the ineffaceable traces of bodily and mental anguish. She had been bowed beneath the burden of woman's inalienable heritage of agony, had lived through the Gethsemane of childbirth and won to the heights of motherhood's Golgotha—a child's grave. But in all this, remember, there is nothing vile; it is only *infinitely pitiful.*

A MEEK-MOUTHED MADONNA.

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Whilst he gazed and thought these things swiftly, she had risen from her place and stood with clasped hands and down-bent head—so like a prisoner awaiting sentence that he felt a great throb of pity. He took a step forward and held out his hand.

"I am going to the train," he said; "but I came away early, that I might see you."

"You are very good," she faltered; "but"—she hesitated.

"But what?" he urged gently, holding both her hands and looking down at her.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, "I know everything."

"You asked Mrs. Deans!" she said in an incredulous voice.

He flushed at the tone. It told so clearly that she fully understood what Mrs. Deans would say; and somehow it seemed to link him with Mrs. Deans, as if he and that worthy woman stood on one side of a river and Myron Holder alone on the other. He could not bear that.

"Yes, but I always judge for myself," he said quickly.

"Oh!" she said. "You are——" She stopped, but gave the note of those swift glances of ineffable gratitude that had so often stirred Homer's heart.

And, looking at her thus, Hardman forgave her everything, "for Love pardons the unpardonable past;" and this man from that moment loved her, although he did not yet know it.

"Your child was very dear to you," he said, glancing at the table, where the two plates stood, although there was but one to sit at the board.

"Ah, so dear!" she answered.

Then, after a moment's pause, she went on swiftly:

"Oh, *you can* understand what it was—surely you can—

you are so good! He was everything to me, absolutely everything! The thought of him kept me from greater sin! I was nearly blind with weariness, and the way was getting dimmer and dimmer to my eyes; but his laugh showed me where the right road lay, and, when I found it again, his steps kept me company! Oh, can you think what it is to see the only creature—the only living thing in all the world—that loves you—die?" She looked at him, an interrogation so poignant as to be imperative in her eyes.

"Yes," he said, "we are two lonely souls, Myron. In all the wide earth there is none who cares whether I live or die."

"I am so sorry," she said. "Only, you are so good you can have friends for the seeking. As for me, I am not fit to be any one's friend. I had one friend here, but he is dead too"—she added the last sentence with a strange, swift sense of justice. Even though Homer was dead, she could not bear that he be classed with those others who had been so cruel.

"Yes," answered Hardman, "I heard of him."

"Did she tell you that he died to save My's life?" she asked.

"Yes, she told me," he answered.

There was a pause, then Myron said:

"It was so good of you to come!" He noticed the harsh tones of her voice.

"Have you a sore throat?" he asked.

"No," she said; "but my child died of suffocation. His throat was swollen with inflammation and croup, and when he tried to speak to me his voice was hard, like mine is now. It made my own throat ache; and ever since, the pain has been there and I have spoken in this way."

Thus, simply, Myron told of that marvel, that extraordi-

nary instance of the power of Love. For this was indeed so. In Myron's case had been made manifest one of those marvellous mysteries of the human mechanism that now and again thrills the scientist with a burning zeal to discover the real relation between mind and matter, to enter the penetralia of humanity and learn its secret. That desolate night in the cottage the mother-heart apprehended each pang of the choking child, and the mother endured in her own organism a like agony. How sad to think she had no Divine license to do so! How strange that such a love should spring from shame!

Hardman's mind grasped the significance of her words upon the instant. For a moment the realization of this woman's strength held him silent. Then he remembered her loneliness and bent towards her.

"Myron," he said, "will you be my friend?"

"Oh, do you mean it?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Assuredly," he said.

Then once more Myron gave her hands as a seal of friendship.

There was only a short time left after that—a few moments of earnest prayer from Philip Hardman—a few words asking her to go to the rest of the meetings—a brief promise from her and briefer acknowledgments of his goodness faltering between her sobs—then Hardman had said good-bye, and his form was already vanishing from sight before Myron realized that she was once more alone.

Philip Hardman hurried to the station and caught his train. The first stage of his journey was short, only some fifty miles to the city, where he was to meet the Reverend Mr. Fletcher. He found him at the depot, ready to go to Jamestown. In a few hurried words Hardman told him of Myron Holder—of her sin—her punishment—her sorrow. He commended her to Mr. Fletcher's prayers, and

asked him to preach so that her diffident heart might find some message in his words.

Mr. Fletcher promised, and expressed with some little emphasis a hope that Hardman's own labors might be blest.

Then he departed. His train was just pulling out when Hardman ran up to the open window, by which Mr. Fletcher had settled himself.

"You'll be gentle with her, Brother Fletcher? She is indeed a bruised reed."

There was no time for answer. Mr. Hardman did not witness the scorn with which this advice—no entreaty—was received. He stood looking after the swiftly vanishing train somewhat sadly; then, rousing himself, went to find out about the train that was to take him to his new charge.

Philip Hardman's father had been a mechanic, a life-long worker in one of those sooty, befouling foundries where the great furnaces gleam like so many mouths of the Pit—where all day long there is the roar of flames, the blast of hot air, the clang of metal, the heat of Hades, the hiss of molten iron, the angry flight of sparks struck from huge anvils; all the haste and fury and dumb-brutish endurance of men working at the top notch of physical exertion, rushing hither and thither like demons before the fires, or clad in grotesque masks and armor, turning great masses of glowing, cooling metal so that the steam-hammers may forge them into shape.

In this atmosphere Philip Hardman's father had spent all his life since he was a little lad, carrying water to the workers—water in which flying sparks quenched themselves, hissing. It would be no wonder if from a race of fathers, such as these blackened workers, gnome-like children were to be born, all action and no thought; *swift, tireless,* inhuman. But these men, darting about in

the glare of the dusky fires, like devil-ridden spectres, had, some of them, time for thought. Indeed, the man who moves unmoved amid these masses of incarnate heat, steps over and around streams of liquid fire, watches those infernal lakes, plumbago-shored, which one single drop of water converts into death-dealing volcanoes, and stands beside a torrent of molten iron as it flows from the crucible, ready to dam its resistless tide on the instant, may well be credited with capacity, if not time, for thought.

To Philip Hardman's father during those long, hot hours of breathless haste there came ideas—distorted, meagre, and ill-developed, perhaps—which, when he left the works at night, pallid-faced beneath the grime, still bore him company: nebulous visions of great labor-saving devices by which men forever would be exempt from the dreadful toil that scorched both soul and body.

There was many a rich germ dormant in these ideas of his, but lacking the cohesion of long, uninterrupted thought, and wanting the quickening of accurate knowledge. For there lay Philip Hardman's great stumbling-block. To perfect his inventions, he required a knowledge of chemicals and of different forces and their application, and an insight into the cause of the effects he wished to produce.

How blindly, painfully and heart-brokenly he toiled after this knowledge no one ever fully appreciated. His son, long years after his death, realized it in some fashion. He did not ask assistance of any one, for he feared, with the traditional dread of the inventor, lest the one from whom he sought advice should steal his idea. He saved, to buy books that were useless to him, and pored over their misleading pages with eyes from which all moisture seemed scorched away, until the very eyeballs themselves felt hot and hard; but he kept them painfully fastened upon

those pages from which he strove to wrest a secret they did not hold, to learn those things which would enable him to set free forever his fellows from the necessity of enduring that soul-baking heat.

Perhaps his invention, even if perfected, would not have compassed all he dreamed it would, for he was prone to endow it almost with thinking as well as executive powers, and to think of it as animated by a great zeal for mankind as, with its nerveless phalanges, it performed those awful tasks. Perhaps there may be greater ideals than the thought of setting men free from one of the most terrible and exhaustive forms of labor; but none knew better than this man the terrors of heat, none understood more clearly how the mind narrowed as the body shrank before the stifling blasts. And, after all, if we all set ourselves to alleviate the special misery we understand, there would be fewer misshapen lives in the world.

Well—

> "How many a vulgar Cato has compelled
> His energies, no longer tameless then,
> To mould a pin, or fabricate a nail!"

Philip Hardman's mother was a woman of a hysteric nature, who scarcely thought enough of this world to make her husband and children comfortable in it. The children were narrow-chested, weak little creatures. They heard from her lips terrible tales of the wrath to come, couched in symbolism they well understood, for their father worked daily amid just such scenes as their mother depicted the abode of the damned to be. The parallel between the Hades her words pictured forth and her husband's life never struck Mrs. Hardman.

Even when her husband died—going to his grave a *broken-hearted* man, barren of achievement, leaving not

one labor-saving device, not one little bolt or wheel called by his name—she did not regret or realize the hard life he had had, nor think she might have made it easier. She only tortured herself daily by wondering if she had sufficiently represented to him his lost condition.

It is to be feared that she was more interested in convincing herself that she was free of responsibility than that he was saved.

In time, however, she began to feel that she had done her best, and, feeling it would be too much like "them Catholics" to pray for the soul of a dead man, she turned all her attention to her own. Doubtless she was right; and yet, is it not a beautiful myth to think that prayer from a loving heart may benefit those we love, even if they have passed "beyond these voices"?

If we must needs pick and choose delusions, why not take those unselfish ones, so beautiful, if inutile? Is it not an idea really worthy of a Divinity to think that by our self-flagellations our loved ones may be freed from stripes? Are there not some of us who would gladly thus requite debts of incalculable benefits received—some of us who would dare accept even a Hell to know our loved one had a Heaven?

Philip Hardman's father had belonged to various insurance societies, such as workmen form for mutual benefit. It would have sufficed to keep life in all the children until such time as they became self-supporting; but one by one they died, until only Philip was left. He worked in the "pattern-shop" in the works until he was twenty, when his mother died. Then he took the residue of his father's insurance money and his own savings and went to school.

It is not strange that he should choose the ministry. He had inherited all his father's love for his kind and much *of his mother's* fervor of purpose, added to which

he had his own birthright of lofty idealism; but he had also something of the weaknesses of both parents. His mother's instability clung to him and made him vacillating, and the secrecy of his father in regard to his inventions survived in him under the guise of habitual reticence. He was deeply impressed with the sadness of life, and thought he saw in religion the one panacea for pain. Besides, he too wished to flee from the wrath to come.

He had been preaching some seven years when he visited Jamestown, and during that time he had bitten through to the ashes more than once. The fruit he held against his lips was losing even its fair seeming.

His charges were always amid the poor, and he was beginning to rebel against a doctrine that accused a Divine Being of all the cruelties life holds. "The poor have the Gospel preached to them" he had once looked upon as the expression of Divine benefaction; now it struck him as being redolent of a peculiar and brutal sarcasm.

Philip Hardman had all his life thought of his religion as only true when environed in an atmosphere of severity. One day, just after a tumult of doubt and a corresponding influx of faith and confidence, he went into a Roman Catholic cathedral. The exact reason for this is hard to divine. Perhaps it may have been some mad thought of attacking Rome in her own citadel. At any rate, he went in and sat down, looking about him with righteous contempt at the "idolatrous images" in their carven niches. His religious dreams had ever been barren of that ecstasy which springs from the grandeur and dignity of gorgeous ceremonials, sonorous chanting, vibrating music. He had never experienced the breathless hush of suspense between the intoned invocation of priests and the *thrilling* choral response. He had never, at the clear-

tongued ringing of a bell, let fall his head and abased his spirit. But now he experienced an emotion such as possessed the monks of the Rosy Cross, when to their fervid vision the stony walls of their cells parted and disclosed vistas of heavenly beauty. He adored with the fervor of the true fanatic The Church—saw her for the first time in the light of a beautiful mistress, to be worshipped alone—for herself—her beauty—her charm—her power.

Philip Hardman left the cathedral, his eyes kindled, his step light. He had had doubts of his love, but they were all gone now. He had been dwelling apart from her; he had but heard echoes of her voice; he had never seen her as he should have seen her, at home—mystical, with dim, subdued and vaporous light, clad in gorgeous vestments; incensed with heavenly odors, irradiate with a hundred colors as the sunlight fell through the painted windows and the altar lights smote answering flames from the gold of the altar; served by humble servitors made holy by their service.

He had regarded her as a poor bride, without a wedding garment, chilled by the cold breath of the world, abashed by the insulting sneers of the ungodly. He now beheld her as she was, a Queen upon a throne, in all the regal magnificence of her regal state.

He was no longer the cherisher of a feeble flame, striving to make it shine in darkness; he was an humble slave of a great lamp, blessed if the farthest-reaching rays from the sacred centre of light shone upon his unworthy head or gilded his outstretched hands. He had thought of his creed pitifully as a "torn leaf out of an old book trampled in the dirt." There was none of that here—no apology—no plea; there was only a triumphant pæan of a glorious creed, a sad mourning over those that were without it.

This spiritual exaltation working upon his eager nature imparted to him a physical stimulus exhilarating and strange. He strode along vigorously. He felt that he was "strong and fleet" in spirit, mind, and body. He walked on; the day waned; distinct thought had long since departed. His mood, which in an Oriental would have induced the coma of the hasheesh eater, prompted him hazily to form great plans for the good of his kind. The good of his kind? No, the glory of The Church. He followed few of these plans to any conclusion. They ended as they had begun, in nebulous imaginings of glory. And, as glory is easily transferable from the worshipped to the worshipper, the ending of his dreams included a cloud of incense to himself—the incense of approval, admiration, and the sweet savor of self-inflicted martyrdom.

He walked on, pitiably unaware of the St. Simeon Stylites attitude he had assumed. Night dimmed down; the wind rose, dead elm leaves were blown across his path, rustling under foot. The night wind, chill with first frosts, aroused him with a shiver to remember where he was. He found himself in the country; long vistas of barren fields stretched out before him a dreary panorama.

The gray sky was darkened by crows flying silently towards their nightly roosts. He passed pools of lifeless water, choked with sodden leaves. A laborer slouched by—a laborer from the railway going home, content because he had earned double pay for a Sunday's work. The odor of decaying vegetables somewhere near struck painfully upon Hardman's senses. This, he thought, with disgust, was the odor of nature—of the world.

The night suddenly dropped down from the clouds, and the darkness urged him to seek shelter. He approached a cottage he observed dimly, finding his way to it up an

uneven lane bordered by a fantastic fence of uprooted stumps, whose ragged branch-like roots, twisted and distorted, stood out in solid black masses against the insubstantial mist of the night. He shuddered.

It seemed to his supersensitive fancy that these grotesque shapes were huge *simulacra* of the animalculæ that the microscope discovers in water. His muscles shrank as he imagined these huge shapes, unseen but not unseeing, writhing through the air, flourishing their weird forms over and around his head, embracing him with their elastic antennæ and moving with him encircled in their horrible, impalpable embrace. With what devilish skill they swept nearer and nearer to him, avoiding him by a hair's breadth, and perceiving how his spirit shrank from their approach! He gazed up into the night, striving to see there the dreadful shapes his fancy had woven into a Dante-like vision. The side glimpses his eyes held of the fantastic forms of the roots projected themselves upon the curtains of the night before him. His breath quickened; he felt stifled; he withdrew his gaze from the clouds and fastened it upon his path, which, to his distorted fancy, seemed to contract until it narrowed down to an impassable barrier of threatening, twining arms.

He stumbled on.

As he staggered across the threshold of the cottage he brushed through a mass of dried, sweet grass, cut down and left to wither in the pathway. Its snuff-like odor brought back the incense of the afternoon. With a strong revulsion of feeling, he threw off alike the sensuous charm of the odor and the horrid phantasmagoria that his imagination had conjured up.

He knocked at the door, feeling a self-disgust that amounted almost to physical nausea.

Philip Hardman after this was especially bitter in his

sermons against Rome—her priests—her altars—her incense—her teachings. He regarded himself as having escaped, hardly by the skin of his teeth, from the clutches of the Scarlet Woman that sitteth upon the Seven Hills, and besought his hearers oft, with all his own peculiar eloquence, to keep themselves withdrawn from the temptations of Rome, of which, he avowed almost with tears, he had felt the power.

This experience has no bearing upon the story of Myron Holder, save inasmuch as it indicates the emotional instability of Philip Hardman. Poor Myron!

CHAPTER XXII.

"Behold, we know not anything!
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all;
And every winter change to spring."

"O Wind, if winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

MR. FLETCHER arrived in Jamestown in due time and was met at the station by Mrs. Deans. Hardly had they started upon their drive to Mrs. Deans' before Mr. Fletcher inquired about Myron Holder. Mrs. Deans launched forth eloquently, and Mr. Fletcher was soon in possession of the same facts and fancies concerning Myron Holder as Philip Hardman had been deluged with; but the Reverend Fletcher viewed the recital differently. He regarded Mrs. Deans' indignation as being the natural feeling of a good woman toward a bad one, and saw in this drawing away of the skirts nothing derogatory to Mrs. *Deans'* womanhood.

The church was filled that evening, and many eyes watched the door eagerly, for the probable appearance of Myron Holder had been a much discussed theme that day. Many of them had missed seeing her the night before, but there certainly was no danger that the like would occur again.

The Reverend Mr. Fletcher entered with his hostess, and, like the clever church diplomat that he was, spoke to the class-leaders and the elect, and smiled benignly but condescendingly upon the lesser lights, and then proceeded, without further parley, to the platform. He was a hard-faced man, with hawk-like features, coarsened by wind and weather; keen, hard eyes, wherein passion had left its light but not its warmth; strong, square jaws, that indicated at once the tenacity and stubbornness of the man. The Reverend Fletcher was indeed a good specimen of the evangelist who goes forth with the Sword of the Smiter rather than the Balm of the Healer. There was no fear of his beguiling any one by false promises of perilous peace.

When he had taken his position behind the reading-desk, he too began to watch the door. From Mrs. Deans' description of Myron Holder he had formed an idea of her appearance. He looked to see some flaunting, rustic beauty, bold of eye, brazen of deportment, gayly dressed perhaps, and defiant of bearing.

It lacked but a moment or two of the time for service when Myron Holder entered the church. She paused a moment in the doorway, looking about her for an inconspicuous seat. There was one but a step from the doorway; she sank into it.

The Reverend Fletcher observed her pale face shine, star-like, for a moment against the darkness of the unlighted porch ere she stepped within the church. He decided instantly that this was indeed one of the elect,

and gave no further thought to her. His whole attention was absorbed in looking for the sinner for whose soul he was to do battle. He thirsted for the fray, but the minutes passed and no one else entered, so he took up his discourse, and soon had his congregation in a spiritual tumult. Ejaculations came thick and fast from his hearers, and there were as many weeping women as any preacher could desire; but the heart of the Reverend Fletcher was hot within him against She, the godless one, who sat at home whilst the warnings and threatenings prepared for her were poured into the ears of every one else in the village.

Meantime Myron sat half-dazed. Truly this was another doctrine than the one she had listened to the night before. Where, amid all these words, was the promise of the pitying Christ? She was out and away the moment Mr. Fletcher uttered his last Amen. As he stood mopping the perspiration from his brow she was speeding through the silent street, and by the time the church was empty she had flung herself, sobbing, on her bed.

When the Reverend Mr. Fletcher discovered that, after all, Myron Holder had been in the church, he was decidedly disgusted. He always liked aiming his remarks at some particular person, and always felt as though he were firing blank cartridges when he could not see the target. Therefore he was more than annoyed to find that he had so scattered his fire when he might have taken accurate aim at Myron. He remarked to Mrs. Deans, with some irascibility, that her description of Myron Holder had been somewhat misleading.

"Oh, she's deep," said Mrs. Deans; "and that sly there's no being up to her. Always goin' about as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth; but as for wickedness *and genuine*, inborn badness! Why, Brother Fletcher,

it's my belief and solemn opinion that she was jest makin' a set at Brother Hardman with them eyes of her'n. I'm glad, Brother Fletcher, that Brother Hardman was called away. He was very young, Brother Hardman was —very."

The Reverend Mr. Fletcher, recalling Hardman's words at the depot, decided that Myron was a dangerous creature—a sly serpent, evidently, in a dove's disguise. The Reverend Fletcher girded his loins to the fray, and was fain to look well to his breastplate of righteousness and to give thanks that it had fallen to his fate to emulate Saint Anthony.

Mrs. White and Mrs. Wilson were invited to take tea "along with the minister" next day, and Mrs. Wilson played her rôle of sorrowing mother to perfection. The two other ladies paid her the delicate compliment of looking fixedly at her for a moment, then shaking their heads lugubriously and exchanging a meaning glance with each other. When the cockles of their hearts were warmed by the Japan tea, they began making allusions to "dispensations," and "afflictions," and "merciful Providences" (terms which in the vocabulary of the sanctified seem to mean the same thing); and Mrs. Wilson began making remarks about "troubles" which were not very intelligible, owing to her beginning them with a sniff and ending in a snivel.

All this fired the zeal of the preacher to no small degree. He resolved they should see the strength of the spiritual sword when wielded by his hands. He assured them that the stubborn neck of the offender should be bowed beneath the Scriptural yoke; that the flinty heart of the sinner should be broken, and that the cause of all this trouble and scandal should be made to do penance.

These cheerful predictions filled the hearts of his hear-

ers with much joy, and they parted in a little flutter of excitement to meet again at the church, where they anticipated, as Mrs. White expressed it, that "Brother Fletcher would show that Myron Holder up in her true colors."

That night Myron sat again in that far-back seat, and again the spiritual thunders of the Reverend Fletcher spent themselves over her head. In all his harangue there was no word to touch her soul.

Death—death—death—was the burden of it all. Now death is a bogy to fright happy children with, not weary women. Life had been so bitter to this woman that its antithesis could not be aught but alluring.

. . . . . .

It was the last night of the Reverend Fletcher's ministration in Jamestown. For three nights he had fired volleys of fire and brimstone at Myron Holder; for three nights she had sat patient, pale, unmoved—her eyes growing wearier and wearier, her face sadder and sadder, as her hope of finding peace grew less and less. It was such a vague hope, not concerned with repentance of sin at all, but wholly comprehended in an ineffable longing for the fabled rest of Philip Hardman's preaching. She had heard no further word of it, and she was beginning to doubt if she had heard aright that night when the sweetness of the words had left a tiny germ of hope behind.

The Reverend Mr. Fletcher was also sorely troubled. His reputation as a revivalist was at stake. The eyes of the village were upon him. It is true that he had had a great measure of success. Every night the anxious-seat had been filled with weeping women. Ossie Annie Abbie Maria White had waxed fairly hysterical as she avowed her sins; Ann Lemon had howled forth a lengthy lamentation of her wickedness; Sol Disney had professed conversion, after "resisting the workings of the spirit within

him for twenty-seven years," as he testified. But all this garnered grain was but as tares in the sight of the Reverend Fletcher because of that one stubborn thistle that refused to bow its head to the Scriptural sickle.

But the Reverend Fletcher was a strategist as well as a fighter. He recalled what Mrs. Deans had said regarding Myron's inordinate love for her child, and, remembering, resolved to win Myron Holder's soul despite herself.

With this resolution strong within him, he took his place for the last time before a Jamestown audience. It ought to have been very gratifying to the ministerial eye—that audience—for all the village was there. All—save with one notable exception. Clem Humphries' place before Mrs. Deans' was vacant, and never again would he vex that worthy woman's soul by his presence in the Jamestown Tabernacle. Clem had left Jamestown. The night before this last meeting Clem, willing to sustain his rôle of a religious individual, rose in his place and in sepulchral tones asked for the prayers of the congregation. It is probable that such a request was never so promptly granted before, for hardly had he resumed his seat before Ann Lemon was upon her feet.

Always voluble, Ann had no difficulty in finding words wherewith to address the Lord, which she proceeded to do upon Clem's behalf, as follows: "O Lord," she commenced. "save this sinful man who seeks Thy aid! You know what he is, O Lord! You know his pretences, his hypocrisy, his sinfulness; but save him, for You can! You know what a sinful man he is, far beyond any hope of good in this world; but, oh, save him! You know he drinks, putting an enemy into his mouth to steal away his soul! You know he lies, and is lazy, and is a Sabbath-breaker, spending in sinful sport the hours when he should *worship Thee*! You know he makes his religion

just a cloak for his deceit! You know all this, for nothing is hid from Thee! You know he oppressed the widow all last winter; but save him, Lord, for You can! Save him now, whilst he seeks Thy aid! You know he did it for his own ends, to make people believe in his goodness; but save him now—now, O Lord, when he can't get out! Save him in spite of himself—make him indeed one of Your sheep!"

Ann sat down, amid a chorus of Amens, and Clem was eagerly besought to testify; but Clem was literally dumb with rage, and sat mute whilst the Reverend Fletcher prayed that the "new-found brother might be given the gift of holy speech" that he might "show forth the mercy he had found," concluding by giving thanks for the conversion of this great sinner. And this to a man who had been so long a favored one with the godly in the land! It was too much. Clem trembled with rage. Ann's life would hardly have been safe at that moment could Clem have laid hands on her. As it was, she did not fall in his way, and old Clem took French leave of Jamestown that night, shaking the dust from off his feet as a testimony against it. He resolved as he left the village never again to try to keep up with the religious folk. Clem decided they made the place too hot for him.

The Reverend Fletcher rose and began his address. Robbed of its exuberance of expression it was an effective one. He concluded with an impassioned appeal to his hearers to accept the truth.

"Is there," he said, "none among you to whom there appears a little, lonely grave, whose whispering grasses plead to you to think of the little one buried there? Wandering alone in Heaven, seeking there the love it had *on earth*, already wearied by its long waiting, already *faltering* as it searches for the loved face, already heart-

sick as it listens to the angels singing the names of the saved on earth—but never, never hears that loved name in the heavenly roll-call? Is there none among you who has an empty heart? Is there none among you who feels, in memory only, the loving touch of baby fingers? Is there none among you who, in dreams only, hears a baby voice cry 'Mother—Mother'? If there is such a mother, will she sit stubbornly silent here whilst her lonely child—orphaned even in Heaven because of her hard-heartedness—searches ever on and on for the mother that will not come to him?"

Mr. Fletcher paused. There was breathless silence for a moment, then there was a stir far back near the door. The congregation moved, looked round, and murmured. A woman's figure came swiftly down the aisle, reached the clear space before the platform—stood—wavered. The next moment Myron Holder had fallen to the floor, prostrate as a novice beneath the pall.

Myron Holder and the Reverend Fletcher stood alone in the empty church. Mrs. Deans waited impatiently outside. She had never dreamed Mr. Fletcher would treat her thus! The noise of the departing congregation was dying away, and Mr. Fletcher was carrying out a stern resolution he had made. He was talking to Myron Holder of her sin and its enormity; upbraiding her for the past, and cautioning her against the future. She listened meekly, admitting her sin and saying no single word in palliation of it. He was giving her stern advice regarding her attitude towards the rest of the village, when she interrupted him for the first time.

"I am leaving Jamestown to-morrow," she said.

"What?" said Mr. Fletcher.

"I am leaving Jamestown to-morrow," she repeated.

The Reverend Fletcher's brow grew stern.

"Is that how you are going to evidence the new mercy you have found—by going out into the world to deceive people?"

"I will deceive no one," she said. "I can do nothing here. In winter I shall have to go on the township again. I must go to earn my living."

"Evil will come of it. Your influence will not be for good. You will spread a moral pestilence. Once I took a long journey in the cars; the car was very dirty, and there was much soot and smoke, and the black coat I wore absorbed the dust and grime. Well, it lost nothing of its good appearance; it was a black coat, like other black coats—to look at. But listen! One day soon after, in a crowded train, I sat next a woman with a white dress on. What was the result? Her dress was smirched and darkened where her sleeve touched mine. So it was always. That coat defiled everything it touched, until I put it from me. It was a good coat, and I could ill afford to do it, but still less could I afford to pollute whatever I touched. It is thus with you. Out of evil, evil will come. We do not gather figs of thistles. Your life has been evil; your heart is bad. Can good emanate from this? You will go forth to the world in fair seeming, no trace of your sin visible to the eye, and you will spread the contagion of your sin. Listen to me, Myron Holder. Do not dare go forth in silence! Do not dare conceal your real nature! Do not dare! Say to each man and woman with whom you have more than the most brief association, 'Lo, I am one who has sinned; I have been a mother but not a wife!'"

Myron gazed at him with horror-wide eyes. His were implacable.

"Am I so dreadful?" she said. "Oh, must I proclaim *my shame* aloud?"

"You must," he said. "What! Would you deny your child on earth and hope to meet him in Heaven?"

She let fall her face in her hands. There was silence for a space, then she raised her head.

"Very well," she said, "I will do as you say."

She turned from his side, and made her way down the church. A strange and new distinction of manner seemed to have enveloped her—a dignity of absolute isolation. She passed through the door, and for the last time Mrs. Deans' eyes looked into hers. That steady gaze lasted some seconds, and then Myron Holder went out into the night.

But in that last meeting of eyes Myron Holder's were not the ones that faltered. As Cain went forth with his curse, did his eyes fall before any living face? He was subject only to fear of his fate. Myron Holder feared only the years she had to live.

That night, in her cottage, Myron Holder sat sewing, fashioning a tiny bag out of one of My's misshapen aprons. When completed, she put something carefully in it and hung it round her neck, concealing it beneath her gown. She folded up her few articles of clean clothing and tied them up, with My's little tin mug, into a neat parcel. She took a last look around the silent rooms, and then went out, closing the door gently behind her, as if heedful not to awaken one who slept.

All along the little path voices seemed to bear her company: the voices of her father, her grandmother, Homer's strong, tender tones, and My's uncertain voice, and each awoke a loving echo in her heart—yes, even the strident voice of her grandmother. They each and all whispered "Good-bye—Good-bye," save the little child's: that was inarticulate, and babbled but of childish love and confidence.

She made her way along the road she had trodden so many times in anguish. She reached the graveyard, and there held her last vigil by the side of My's grave.

The stars were yet in the sky—the mysterious stars of morning skies—when she rose to her feet. She went to each of the other graves that her heart held, and then came back to this one, the newest and smallest of the four. She looked down upon it with the pain of child-birth in her eyes, then up to the "mindful stars." She turned away with a prayer upon her lips—the same in which was uttered her agony in the cottage; the same prayer that had faltered from her lips in the church—not "Lord—Lord," but "My—My!"

So Myron Holder left Jamestown, and with her we leave it also. There is much yet that might be told of the place—of the strange death that befell Bing White; of the marriage of Gamaliel Deans to Liz, the bound girl; of the penance of pain that was meted out to Mrs. Deans for the evil she had wrought; of how Mr. and Mrs. Wilson were turned out of their farm by those of their children who had so pitied them whilst Homer lived; of how, after all, the old ragman found a fortune in rags, though not in the way he had dreamed of; of how the new church was built, and of how the old Holder cottage still stands, a ruin amid its garden, peopled only by sparrows; of how a new railway runs through the school playground, and banishes the buttercups by its cinders to the other side of the broken-down fence. There they run riot, having spread even up to the doorstep of the old cottage, where they cluster about the roots of the hopvines.

There have been many changes in Jamestown—great factories disfigure the margin of the lake, defile the streams with their refuse, and befoul the atmosphere with

their smoke. A long row of workmen's cottages, depressingly alike in gable and window, has crowded the Black Horse Inn out of existence. Its old bricks pave the paths over which the mill-hands go to work; the last vestige of its violets has vanished.

The hearts of the Jamestown women, however, have not changed. The same merciless virtue that hounded Myron Holder pursues the poor factory girl who falters on her way. The same pointing fingers sting her soul. The same condemnation, the same cruelty, the same scorn, greet her as were meted out to Myron Holder.

In the olden days it was the vestal virgins, charged with keeping alight the fires that burned upon the altars sacred to home, that doomed the fallen gladiator to death; their inflexible gesture negatived the pleading of the upraised hand. There is no single instance given where they exercised the power of pardon vested in them. And to-day the verdict upon the fallen comes from women also; and is there any record of pardons?

But, O women, think well before you utter a harsh judgment! Your verdict is the more sacred by virtue of being pronounced upon your own sex, for woman is more nearly allied to woman than man to man. Each woman is linked to her sister women by the indissoluble bond of common pain. "For men must work and women must weep" may have its exceptions as to men who, by favoring fortune or a kindly fate, may escape their heritage of labor; but did a woman ever elude her birthright of tears?

It rests with women whether the bitter cup these unhappy ones drink be brimmed to the lip or not.

Ah, well! there are many Jamestowns, and many women therein. "By their works ye shall know them."

To the Jamestown women we have known through

their treatment of Myron Holder we say farewell gladly, only asking them—

"HAVE YE DONE WELL? They moulder flesh and bone,
Who might have made this life's envenomed dream
A sweeter draught than ye shall ever taste, I deem."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"God gives him painful bread, and for all wine
Doth feed him on sharp salt of simple tears,
And bitter fast of blood."

"Come—pain ye shall have and be blind to the ending!
Come—fear ye shall have 'mid the sky's overcasting!
Come—change ye shall have, for far are ye wending!
Come—no crown ye shall have for your thirst and your fasting!"

MYRON HOLDER, in the blue garb of a professional nurse, stood one spring morning looking out of one of the high windows in the great hospital where she worked. Three years had passed since that daybreak when she turned her back on Jamestown. With what trembling steps she had made her way to town, to the house of the doctor who had attended old Mr. Carroll! He had suggested to her the vocation of professional nursing, having observed her natural aptitude for it when she was tending Mr. Carroll. He had given her his address, and bade her come to him if she decided to adopt the course he had indicated. She had done so, and, through his recommendation, she had obtained admittance to this hospital. Since then she had worked and studied hard, and had gained her certificate as a trained nurse.

She had gone forth from Jamestown "lonely as a cloud," *and not without* sorrow. The wild flower that grows by

the bleakest roadside wilts and droops for a time, at least, when transplanted to even the most sheltered garden. The stunted cedar, clinging to a crevice in the granite, drawing its meagre juices hardly from the niggard soil, yellows and dies when rent by the resistless wind from its rocky resting-place. The barrenness of the mountain-side seems kinder to it than the green meadows to which it is hurled.

For some little time Myron was bewildered by the strange world which she had entered, but it did not remain long strange; it soon developed familiar phases.

She bore forever the burden of the hateful pledge the Reverend Mr. Fletcher had wrung from her. In the old, harsh days of Puritanical prudery and intolerance, the Evil Woman bore upon her breast a flamy insignia of shame—a beacon warning all not to trust their hopes or fears or joys to that perfidious bosom which had been false to its own womanhood, a something which could be seen afar off, a mute, yet eloquent, cry: "Unclean—Unclean!"

But the milder methods of modern Christianity were far different. They fastened no physical sign of degradation upon the object of their righteous wrath; no burning letter or brand. Hers was no torch of shame to light the beholder to other paths than that which lay by her side.

Hawthorne's stately Evil Woman bore an implacable face above that fatal mark; strode upon her way with "the stern step of vanquished will," defied by her mien her accusers and her judges. Upon her countenance was writ in all the varied hieroglyphics of tint and expression, line and curve, the story of her passion and her shame.

Not so this humble village outcast. Her mien showed

rather the tender sorrow of a face created for tears—a face whose lips held pain enough prisoned behind their paleness to wail the woe of the whole world; eyes which had looked at death unflinchingly through the pangs of the sublimest torture womanhood knows rather than betray the coward who had forsaken her; eyes which had looked at misery and pain, suffering and death, so often that they seemed to have lost the power of reflecting aught else; eyes which held in their depths nothing but the resignation, despair, and the settled purpose of undeviating will. Sometimes, when the child was alive, there had shone in their depths varying shadows; then there were moments when she allowed herself to wish and hope and fear. But that was past, just as was her mad rebellion against his death.

Such was Myron Holder—meek, quiet, hopeless; bearing the burden imposed upon her by convention's unsparing, if righteous, hand. Men, looking at her, instinctively felt their own vileness; and women saw in her a refuge from their own weakness and sins until they knew of hers; then, rejoicing that they yet had power to wound something, crucified her afresh. Many a time her heart bled from stings implanted by lips she had moistened night after night. Many a time her face flushed before the scorn expressed in eyes that would have been forever darkened but for her untiring skill and patience.

Truly, to lay upon this woman the task of avowing her guilt to each human being who should ever look upon her with kindly tolerance was a measure that the old Puritans would not have adopted. The stake had not receded quite so far into the dim perspective of the past as it has now; and if they had deemed her worthy of the supremest tor*ture,* they would probably have chosen the more merciful *flames.*

Myron indeed stood within the shadow of the cross. But it must be remembered that whilst the cross has been the emblem of much mercy, it was also the symbol beneath which the Inquisition sat in council. It must be conceded that the Church is not very lenient with women. We remember its attitude when chloroform was introduced.

The mercy that the Reverend Mr. Fletcher had proffered Myron Holder was much like the salt that Eastern torturers rub into the wounds of their victims.

There was little to be seen from the high window where Myron stood—the topmost branches of a horse-chestnut tree just leafing out; a wide arch of gray-blue sky; and, far off, a confused mass of chimneys, where the city lay beneath its veil of smoke.

But Myron was not thinking of the busy city, of the tapping chestnut boughs, nor even of the overspan of pellucid sky. She was thinking of a cruel, sordid, babbling little village and of the silent, unkempt field wherein its dead lay. Her musings were interrputed by the ringing of a bell. She turned and hastened from the room—blue-clad, white-capped, capable—to find a new patient had arrived in her ward; a new patient, with thin, broad, stooped shoulders, overhanging pent-house brow, sad and secret, above sunken gray eyes that shone with unalterable love for mankind; a patient who, when he saw her coming, held out his hands and whispered "Myron—Myron!" and gave her such a look as banished all the bitterness of her barren belief and again bestowed the blessed benediction of peace.

Thus Philip Hardman and Myron Holder met again.

Philip Hardman was no longer a recognized minister of the Church. His doubts had grown too strong for his belief, or his beliefs had grown greater than his creed; and he had gone forth from the church to become an itinerant

preacher, like the man Christ Jesus. He was miserably uncertain and unsettled.

Little bands of devotees gathered about him in every town he visited. They were those who were mentally maimed, or halt, or blind; those whose aspirations exceeded their capabilities; those in whose hearts a never-healing sore throbbed in unison with the suffering of mankind; those who were, like Philip Hardman, striving to flee from the wrath to come and found themselves bewildered amid the crossways. His followers were, in all places, strangely alike. They gathered to him gradually, and when he left they scattered. There was no unity of purpose among them, no common determination toward one end, to bind them together.

The Western worlds are not ready yet for those creedless, formless, Eastern doctrines of Universal Love. Poor Philip Hardman, in an Oriental world, would have made an excellent devotee, to dream away his years in spiritual abstraction with the best of them; nay, he might even have found courage to release his soul by fire from its earthly charnel like the old East Indians; but he made a poor minister; he was a good enough *preacher*, eloquent enough, and earnest enough, pitiful towards others, merciless to himself; but, constantly bewildered by the indefiniteness of his own aspirations, he could not minister any healing balm to the sorrows he deplored.

He never felt awkward nor constrained with his followers, only desperately unhappy. They looked to him for a message, and he had none to give them; he raised hopes in their breasts which he could not justify; held out a cup which proved empty when thirsty lips drew near.

When he left a town he was haunted for days by the yearning eyes he had left unlit by hope; yet he could not *bring himself* to desert the cross utterly, for

"Ever on the faint and flagging air
A doleful spirit with a dreary note
Cried in his fearful ear, 'Prepare—Prepare!'"

So he had stumbled on, the strong in him strong only to discern the needs, the wants, the sadness and cruelty of the world, not strong enough to evolve a creed of Truth to alleviate its misery; the weak in him only weak enough to make him shrink from giving up utterly the old dogmas that hampered his hands, not weak enough to permit him to steep himself in scriptural ease and spend all his time striving to save his own miserable soul.

Hardman had come to the charity ward of the hospital to be treated for that common and troublesome disease familiarly known as "preacher's sore throat." It was a very natural result of speaking night after night in all sorts of weathers in the open air. He had persisted in his preaching, however, until his voice had become attenuated almost to a whisper; then suddenly realizing the gravity of his case, he had fled to the hospital in a panic. Myron's post was in the charity ward, by far the most arduous department in the hospital. Thus Hardman came directly under her care.

Relieved from the nervous excitement of his occupation, Hardman's fictitious strength suddenly collapsed, and, having squandered his resources recklessly, he was now left with very little stamina to fall back upon. But Myron tended him night and day, throwing into her efforts all the determination of her strong nature; and, little by little, she conquered. Philip Hardman himself had been as passive during the struggle as a bone for which two dogs fight; but after the fever left him he began to realize how nearly his doubts and surmises had been all solved, and looking at Myron's weary face read in a moment all the meaning of its weariness. From that time her care was seconded by his eager desire for health.

Then there fell upon those two that strange enchantment which entered the world when the first bird sang its first love song, which will endure till "the last bird fly into the last night."

> "What time the mighty moon was gathering light,
> Love paced the thymy plots of Paradise."

What strange paths he has trodden since then! What devious ways he has threaded! What strait gates he has entered! Upon how many sandy shores he has left his immortal footprints! For all the oceans of human life, all its flood tides of hope, all its ebb tides of despair, cannot efface them. Let Love once set his signet seal upon a brow, and all the gilding of glory, all the blackness of shame, the rose wreath nor the crown of thorns—nay, even Death itself—cannot blot it out.

Life—Love—Death—the true Trinity, teaching all things, could we but decipher them. Of Life we know the ending; of Death, the beginning; of Love, nothing. It springs without sowing, and bears many harvests. To these two lonely souls it brought a gift of "unhoped, great delight."

"Love, that all things doth redress," blotted out for a space the toil and moil of their lives. Hardman told Myron how he had loved her ever since he saw her; told her how her name had been mentioned in every prayer his lips had uttered since he left Jamestown; told her how he had written to her, and of how the letter had been, after many days, returned to him from the Dead Letter Office. Myron smiled a little at that; she understood so well the pang it must have cost Mrs. Warner to return it. Indeed, Mrs. Warner (who was postmaster in Jamestown) had suffered real tortures of curiosity and kept the letter twice *the regulation* time before she sent it to the Dead Letter

Office. But "The Government" was a vague and awful power in Mrs. Warner's eyes, and, as she expressed it to her husband, "You never know what it knows, and what it don't."

Philip did not tell Myron about his doubts, nor that he had voluntarily forfeited his standing in the orthodox church. And she did not tell him of the promise that the Reverend Mr. Fletcher had exacted from her. Perhaps it was this mutual reticence that wrecked them. But for a short space they were indeed happy.

But as Philip grew stronger the inevitable problem of the future presented itself.

Philip asked Myron one day if she had attended the rest of the meetings after he left Jamestown.

"Yes," she said; "I am a Christian."

That calm statement of hers seemed to impose an impassable barrier between them. She had attained the peace he had lost. She held fast the hope that he was all but relinquishing. She was strong in the faith in which he was so weak.

She told him of her first struggle in the hospital; of the difficulty she had had in mastering the "book learning" of her profession; of the weariness she endured and the hopelessness she had overcome; and, listening, he thought his heart would break. How could he take from her the Faith that had made this possible? How deprive her of the inspiration that kept her worthy? Poor Philip Hardman thought he had alienated himself from his church utterly; but he had in no wise cast off its bonds; he still clung to the enervating doctrine of dependence upon supernatural help, and could not realize that in Myron's womanhood alone lay the strength, the purity of purpose, and the endurance that had brought her thus far upon her way.

Sometimes he wondered if it were possible that he could

pass the cup from lip to lip, and the morsel from mouth to mouth, and yet be himself athirst and hungry. Now and then the thought came to him that he was but suffering from some spiritual sickness that would pass from him like a physical disease, and leave him weak, perhaps, but safe in his old beliefs. When he thought of this, he pictured himself in his old position as minister and wondered if to marry Myron would conserve the interests of his Faith. This was the one unworthy thought of which he was guilty. The man was weak, but this was shameful.

It seems incredible to us that this man, having, as he knew, this woman's happiness in the hollow of his hand, loving her as he undoubtedly did, should have hesitated. Had he fully understood the conditions of her life, it is impossible to believe he would have done so; but so few of us know each other "face to face."

And Philip Hardman was very humble in his estimate of himself. He did not allow himself to think that his life would compensate to Myron Holder for the spiritual benefits she might lose by marrying him. Indeed, this poor, tossed soul sometimes recalled with a shudder that mysterious Sin for which there is no forgiveness, and wondered if he had been guilty of it; then he trembled when Myron Holder approached lest she be contaminated.

It seems this poor man was incapable of understanding the true beauty of Love. So that now he would wonder if Myron Holder as his wife would stultify his efforts for the Faith, and presently tremble lest he drag her down to the perdition he feared. At this juncture he deliberately shifted the burden from his own shoulders to those of Myron Holder. He asked her to decide, expressing his *own love for* her and saying tenderly:

"*And you*, Myron, you love me?"

She only looked her answer, but the eloquence of her look seemed to argue and decide the whole case.

This conversation occurred in the morning. In the evening, just as dusk fell, Myron came to the ward and sat by him for a little space. Now that the burden was shifted off his own shoulders Philip felt calm and happy.

He lay long, and gazed upon her as she sat beside him, gathered the tender strength of her face, the sweet womanliness of her form, the resolution and patience that made bright her brow, and noted all the beauty of her eyes. He pictured their future life together; he thought of her sitting by him in the twilight; of her bidding him good-bye in the morning; of her welcoming him at night; he thought of her looking up at him in the pauses of some household task; he imagined her eyes as they would turn to him for guidance; he dreamed of their comfort when he looked to them for love. He thought of all these things, and then abased himself before the vision of a holy, patient face,—the face of the mother of his child.

'Mid these thoughts speech does not find ready way. They were together silent, hand in hand.

The time came for Myron to go. It was almost dark in the ward, and an angled screen hid them from view.

"Myron," whispered Philip, and looked at her pleadingly.

She looked at him—her head sank near his—he kissed her—her lips were trembling. He passed an arm about her shoulder and gave her a tender, reassuring pressure.

"I will know in the morning?" he said.

"Yes," she answered, and turned to leave him. She hesitated at the foot of the bed and then turned toward him again. "Good-night," she said. "Good-night, Philip."

Then she turned and went swiftly from the ward, passing the night nurse at the door.

Hardman felt a moisture on his hand, the hand she had held as she said "Good-night."

"She was crying, bless her, and I never knew it," he thought.

He soon slept. It would seem that he was content so long as Myron made the decision and thus relieved him from the responsibility and consequences of doing so. Well, we cannot tell. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness," and it is not for us to judge Hardman. But whilst withholding judgment upon him we need not spare to pity Myron, who, prone upon the narrow couch in the bare dormitory, was face to face with her own soul.

Whilst Hardman slept, having cast off his burden, she was tasting the bitterness of death. Myron Holder's agony would have indeed bewildered him could he have witnessed it. It was in such strong contrast to the peace of that perfect hour just past. He could not have realized the battle Myron had done with herself, her tears, her fears, whilst she sat by him; and he comforted himself with visions of an illusive future. Alas! Poor Myron—poor Hardman! Not for them was "The House of Fulfillment of Craving," not for them the "Cup with the roses around it."

We cannot trace step by step the progress of the struggle.

"A sign—a sign!" she cried in her pain. "Oh, what shall I do?"

It was at midnight when the sign was given her and the path pointed out. The clock in her room had just struck twelve when the electric bell at her bedside rang, summoning her downstairs. She rose hastily, and quickly dashing a little cold water in her face, assumed her cap and hurried out. She found the entire staff of nurses *assembling*. They were gathering about the medical

officer in charge of the hospital. He held a telegram in his hand. When they had all come, he read it aloud. It was brief. An urgent appeal from a quarantine station asking for volunteer nurses for cholera patients. The doctor read it and waited. The little crowd of women before him murmured confusedly. Some faces reddened, some paled. The doctor read the telegram again, and said quietly:

"The need is urgent, but I advise no one. If, however, any of you will go, she must be ready in an hour. The express leaves then."

He paused. There was no answer. His face paled a little. He had been very proud of his intrepid nurses, this doctor, and somehow, in this time of trial, they seemed about to be found wanting.

"As soon as each one makes up her mind," he said, "she will return to her duties or acquaint me with her determination to go."

The group before him parted as if by a single impulse, each seeking to escape unseen to her place. Only one came forward quietly, and said steadily:

"I will go, sir, if you will let me."

The departing ones stayed their steps and listened.

"It is Nurse Myron," they said to each other.

"Yes," said the doctor, catching one of these remarks, "it is Nurse Myron, of whom you have made a pariah. Go back to your duties, please." His voice, usually so gentle, was stern and peremptory. They went.

An hour later, Myron Holder left the hospital. As she came down from the dormitory, clad in the blue serge gown with its cape and close-fitting hat, she went into the charity ward. Quietly she stole along its length until she came to the bed in the corner. A straight shaft of moon-

light fell upon the pillow. It made visible all the strength and beauty of Hardman's brow and showed all the sweetness of his mouth, all the kindly expression of his face. His brow was placid; his lips smiled. To the woman's eyes there was nothing weak, nothing cowardly, in the man before her. He was her saint among men.

"He will know in the morning," she said. The doctor beckoned from the door. She murmured again, "He will know in the morning," and so bade him an eternal farewell.

. . . . . .

Next morning Philip Hardman learned from the doctor of Myron's act.

"The nurses say you are a minister, and that she loved you," said the doctor. "If praying is your trade, pray for her, man; she has need of it." Then he passed on. He was a little bitter and stern, the good doctor, that morning.

There comes a time to some of us,

> "When happy dreams have just gone by
> And left us without remedy
> Within the unpitying hands of life."

Those of us who have lived through such an hour can understand what had come to Philip Hardman. He saw now clearly what he ought to have done, but it was too late. He tried to comfort himself with the hope that she would come back, and *then*, he told himself, no power in earth or heaven should come between them.

How vain this hope was the event proved; but it was well he had it at the moment, else his self-reproach would have been too poignant. As it was, his fever returned and it was many days before he heard his last tidings of Myron

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Holder. He was told, and lived. That is all we need say or care to hear of Philip Hardman.

"Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Death comes to set thee free,
Oh, meet him cheerily
As thy true friend;
Then all thy cares shall cease
And in eternal peace
Thy penance end."

"Even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to the sea."

THE arrival of the new nurse had been announced to the doctor in charge of the quarantine station. He waited for her coming in his office. She entered the room, paused for a moment on the threshold, and then came forward. The light, to which his back was turned, fell full upon her face,—a face devoid of bitterness as it was of joy. Her form, clad in the regulation nurse's garb of blue, showed in strong relief against the unpainted pine walls of the great doctor's office—a somewhat broad, low figure, not slight, nor lissome, but most eloquently womanly. Her lips parted in a question which he did not hear.

Time had gone back with him. He stood upon a jutting ledge of rock, which from the ridge hung out into the blue. He was alone, and waiting—waiting with every faculty of his will strained to the utmost; looking through

a parting in the leaves between the tree-trunks, he watched for a girl's figure. Far away there was a glimmer of water; somewhere a village band was practising, but distance deadened all sound from it save the throb of the heavy drum which pulsed through the air and seemed to add motion to the heavy, odorous vapor of the summer night and send it eddying up in perfumed waves about the craggy platform. Then he saw one coming, flushed, and "foot gilt with all the blossom dust" of wild venollia, fleabane and spent moondaisies. And then he held once more a trembling maiden form within his clasp. Again from out the hollow of his arm there looked up at him two eyes of clearest, purest glance. Again he dwelt upon the smooth forehead with its faint upraised brows. Again he kissed the white throat bent outward like a singing bird's, as her head rested against him and her eyes met his. Again he saw those eyes grow dim and moist. Again he felt the encircled form tremble. Again he stilled the appealing lips with a kiss. Again he vowed eternal faith. Again he heard her say—

"Will you be good enough to tell me my duties?" the new nurse was saying, in low, strained tones, in a voice without modulation and suggestive of reiteration.

"What is your name?" he asked, with unstrung joints.

"I am Myron Holder," she said, and looked at him.

Her lips did not quiver. Her cheeks did not flush. Her eyes did not falter. All the majesty of a wronged womanhood shone upon her brow. Her glance spoke of a dignity far beyond the gift of man, above the world's honor—a dignity bought at a terrible price and sealed with a terrible seal of loneliness and separation.

"Ah!" he said, and leaned upon the table at his side, mentally acknowledging the strength of her presence. "I *am Henry* Willis," he said. "Did you know me?"

"I recognized you when I came into the room," she answered, in a monotonous tone.

There was a pause. Her eyes rested upon him unwaveringly, and sent from their depths intolerable meanings of contempt and righteous indignation and hopeless reproach.

He came a step nearer.

"Let me—" he began. She stepped back—her nostrils dilated.

"Would you be good enough to tell me my duties?" she said.

"Tell me how you came here."

"I am Nurse Myron," she said, and uttered no further word.

He waited in a silence she did not break.

"If you will come with me," he said at length.

She signified her acquiescence and followed him.

Days passed—long days and nights which seemed to outlast eternity in their dreary passage. Day by day the nurses and physicians did battle with the foul pestilential scourge they were striving to stifle. The great Dr. Willis, the eminent bacteriologist, peered and pried incessantly over his gelatin films, striving to win the secret of infection and its origin from the minute particles of matter he held prisoned there. But yet more earnestly did he strive to learn the secret of one strong, brave soul, but in vain.

The quality Dr. Willis most admired, respected and understood was Will, but here it reigned in such transcendent strength that he stood appalled before it. From that moment of retrospect and recognition he had awakened with a galling sense of his own inferiority. Never before had Henry Willis owned the domination of a living will. *Now the wide* earth held no sweetness, all his achievements

no triumph for him, unless he could once more possess the woman who had, so long ago, been wholly his.

They worked side by side. As the cases multiplied, and two of the men nurses were stricken with the disease, Henry Willis, perforce threw aside his experiments and flung himself into the fray. Day by day saw these two drawn closer and closer together by the exigencies of their peculiar and dreadful position. No more volunteers were forthcoming. The force in the quarantine station was weakening. The physician, albeit wiry and of an iron physique, was pale and thin.

Myron Holder's strong frame and brave heart were giving way; only her will sustained each. Her eyes shone neither steadily nor calmly now, but burned with desperate courage.

Dr. Willis came to her one day with a newspaper containing reports of their work. The names of Dr. Henry Willis and Nurse Myron were coupled with honorable and enduring encomiums. She read it standing in the corridor before his office door. As she read and gathered the import of the words, a change overspread her face. Her eyes, of late so hot and dry, grew moist; her lips trembled; from brow to chin the color flushed her face, bringing back to it all the charm of a crushed and subordinate womanhood. She read the article over and looked him full in the face.

"My name is here and yours," she said. Then, in a voice which had burst from its shackles at last, and rang out clear and high, "They should be read above the grave of a nameless child."

She paused a moment—long enough for the man before her to gather the meaning of her words—long enough to allow memory to whelm her own heart and break it at last, and then she sank upon the floor, weeping and crying *aloud for* her dead child.

When Henry Willis carried her to the office, the first paroxysmal symptoms of cholera had set in.

. . . . . .

All hope was over. Nurse Myron was dying. Every remedy despairing skill could suggest had been resorted to, but in vain. Transfusion of blood had brought not even an evanescent strength. The disease had culminated, and death was simply a question of minutes—an hour at most.

Her face had become olive in tint, and shone up with Murillo-like beauty of tint and form from the pillow. Beside her, in all the abandon of shattered hope, knelt Henry Willis. But to all his pleading Myron Holder was deaf, until, by the inspiration of despair, he cried aloud:

"For his sake, to give him a name!"

Then she consented. In the presence of the remnant of nurses left, blessed by the devoted minister who also lived among these dangers, Myron Holder and Henry Willis took each other for man and wife.

They were alone. He held her hand, awed by the supernal brightness of her eyes.

"You will write his name above his grave?" she said. "His real name—Henry Willis? Do you know what I called him? My—little My."

"Live," he murmured. "Live to let me atone—to be happy—to be adored. Live—you can if you will."

"Could I?" she said. "Life holds nothing for me; Death him, or forgetfulness."

Her eyes began to film. He bent over her distractedly, calling her tender names, pleading for a look—a sign.

"Speak to me—forgive me," he cried. "Myron—Myron!"

"I forgive you," she said, looking at him once again with calm and steadfast eye of divine forgetfulness. She sank *into a stupor*, through which she murmured "My—

little My"—tenderly, as to a sleeping child. Then suddenly her eyes opened, a flood of ineffable brightness illumined her face, she stretched forth her arms and uttered a name in a cry of joyous hope, and sank back. The world was over for her. There but remained the involuntary efforts of life against annihilation, efforts which, happily, were few and brief. Twenty minutes after she became a wife, Myron Willis had passed—

> "'And surely,' all folk said,
> 'None ever saw such joy on visage dead.'"

They buried her, as the law required, with the rest of those who died of the pest. Upon her breast they found an ill-made little bag of checked blue and white cotton. Within it was a flossy skein of child's hair tangled by many tears and kisses. They brought it to Dr. Willis, and he replaced it upon the dead breast with whose secret sobs and sighs it had risen and fallen for so long.

The newspapers gave a pathetic account of the "Romance in a Quarantine Station," and told how the famous Dr. Willis, meeting his "girl love" in the hospital, had married her on her deathbed. The tale cast quite a romantic lustre over the doctor's somewhat prosaic career of medical achievement.

There was no word said, however, of their first meeting and parting, nor of a little grave that to this day is unmarked save for a tiny tablet whereon is carven one syllable—MY.

THE END.

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